

South of the Garden

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

Volume 31, Number 1

March 2010

Updates

The Duke Divinity Women's Center honored Jill Raitt at its 35th Anniversary Celebration last November. Jill was the first woman on the Divinity School faculty and she kindly gave up her office in the school's basement so the newly founded center could have a home in the fall of 1974. At the anniversary celebration, Therese Berger, now of Yale Divinity School, gave the first Jill Raitt Lecture. Those attending included former students Nancy Rosebaugh, Joann Abel, Linda Hawkins, Fran Olson, Jenny Graves, Helen Neinast, Amelia Stinson-Wesley, Rosanna Panizo, Betty Wolfe, Ron Moss, and Carol Burnett, and friends such as Lois MacGillivray, Betsy Alden, Jean O'Barr, Sarah Freedman, Lori Pistor, and Laurie Hays Coffman. I (Jeanette Stokes) served as the second director of the Women's Center and was part of the planning committee along with current Women's Center co-coordinators Brandy Daniels and Emma Akpan, RCWMS intern Meghan Florian, and Divinity Professor Mary McClintock Fulkerson.

Since the first of the year, RCWMS has hosted two writing weeks at the beach as well as an art workshop. I've been up and down the road to the coast a lot, but I can't complain. It's a treat to go to the beach and be with wonderful women. When I drove over the bridge to Emerald Isle, NC in mid-February at about 6:00 pm, the sun had just set and the western horizon was flushed with a deep pink. I glanced at the water that separates Emerald Isle from the mainland and noticed that each of the small grassy islands in the sound was surrounded by a pink glow. I looked again and decided it must be low tide. Wet sand around each island was reflecting the sky.

That color was a wonderful welcome to *Finding Your Medium*, our art workshop with Sue Sneddon. In addition to Sue's inspiring teaching, a highlight of the weekend was her beach encounter with a live seal. When we contacted a North Carolina marine biologist, we learned that our waters do have seals, that they should be left alone to rest on the beach, and that they have teeth.

FILMS

Our newest documentary *Blackbirds, Bottle Caps, & Broken Records: Environmental Artist Bryant Holsenbeck at Work* was shown in January as part of Strange Beauty, a film festival in Durham, NC. Filmmaker Margaret Morales came from Miami, Florida for the event and the film team (Margaret, Bryant, Jenny Graves, and I) was able to have one more delicious evening together. Jenny had just moved back from a semester in Philadelphia. She is now working as a community organizer for Clean Energy Durham. Margaret has a similar job in Miami working on clean water. To order the film (\$15 includes tax and postage), send a check to RCWMS, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701 or go to www.rwcms.org.

Our hour-long documentary *Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images* will be shown at two locations in California in March. Join Executive Producer Amy Kellum for a public screening at Ebenezer/Herchurch Lutheran in San Francisco on Monday, March 22 at 7:00 pm or First Congregational Church of Berkeley on Tuesday, March 23 at 7:00. The screenings are free and open to the public. The DVD may be ordered for \$35 (includes tax and postage). Send a check to RCWMS, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701 or go to www.meinradproject.org.



Jill Raitt

photo by J. Stokes

Duke Div.

by Meghan Florian

Last fall, the Women's Center at Duke Divinity School celebrated its 35th anniversary. As a DDS graduate and the RCWMS intern, I helped to plan the anniversary events of November 12-13, 2009. Throughout the planning and the event, I reflected on my Divinity School experiences and the role the Women's Center played in my formation.

Growing up as an evangelical, feminism didn't come up in conversation. My mother is a strong, independent woman, and she and my father raised me to believe I could be anything I wanted; even so, in church settings feminism was frowned upon. The archetypal woman of Proverbs 31 was the role model set before me, and it was assumed that while women might be leaders of other women, they were supposed to be submissive to men.

I wrestled with this, skeptical of gender norms, yet accepting the assumption that feminism was not compatible with my faith. I knew something wasn't right though. My parents hadn't set me on the same trajectory my friends were following—marrying and having children right out of high school, watching their husbands pursue successful careers while they remained in the domestic sphere. My parents had worked hard so I could go to college, support myself, and live my dreams.

I carried these mixed messages to college, where my mostly Christian professors introduced me to feminist thought, coaxed me to speak up in class, affirmed my gifts, and helped me see how much more I might be than my evangelical past allowed me to consider.

Still, I had no way to reconcile my new questions about gender and sexuality with the faith that shaped my life, until a male professor put Rosemary Radford Ruether in my hands and I suddenly realized that the God I had been imaging was not God at all, but an idea created in the image of man. The language I had been given was suddenly insufficient. My entire world turned upside down and I had no idea what to do or say. I kept reading, thinking, and talking to feminist friends, learning from their strength and confidence. My professors, male and female, encouraged me to pursue feminist questions in my course work, and suggested I think about graduate school.

And so, I came to Duke Divinity School. "Why Duke?" Simply put, they let me in. I wanted to study Kierkegaard with Amy Laura Hall, and I knew of the program in Gender, Theology, and Ministry. Not many places could combine my love of Kierkegaard, my passion for gender studies, and my penchant for theological questioning. It seemed the perfect mix.

Things are not always what they seem, however. Affiliating with the Women's Center at Duke earned me a reputation as a radical—a reputation I accept readily now, but was unprepared for. The emphasis on the core curriculum at Duke made it nearly impossible for me to take any gender-related courses my first year. In conversations over coffee with seemingly intelligent young men, as soon as I mentioned my intention to pursue the Gender Certificate, the subject abruptly changed. I felt lost, confused, and lonely, until I showed up at the first Women's Center potluck of the year.

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. See more at: www.rcwms.org.

*March 4, 2010, Thursday
WOMEN'S LABYRINTH WALK & POTLUCK
Groce UMC, Asheville, NC
Walks at 4:30 & 7:00 pm, potluck at 6:00 pm
Leader: Jeanette Stokes
Cost: \$10-20, sliding scale. Cost shouldn't deter anyone.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

March 6, 2010, Saturday, 9:00 am–5:00 pm
COMPASSIONATE LISTENING & PEACEMAKING: An Introductory Training
Chapel Hill Friends Meeting, Chapel Hill, NC
Learn to listen and to see ourselves in the 'other.'
Cost: \$25-75, sliding, www.compassionatelisting.org
Contact: Jan, 919-967-1959, janhutton@earthlink.net

March 7, 2010, Sunday, 2:00–4:00 pm
RECEPTION for *Emergence, Figurative Clay Sculpture* by Melissa York and Lithographs by Susan Soper
Horace Williams House, Chapel Hill, NC
Exhibit open March 7–28, Tues–Fri 10–4 pm, Sun 1–4 pm
Contact: www.melissayorkart.com

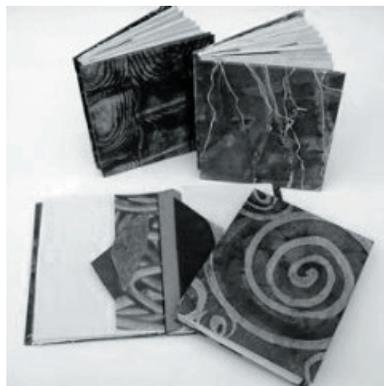
*March 9, 16, & 23, 2010, three Tuesdays, 6:30–9:00 pm
BOOKMAKING WORKSHOP with Bryant Holsenbeck
Location: Scrap Exchange, Durham, NC
We'll make whimsical, usable books and discuss a variety of approaches to recording our lives. Learn to make paste paper, cover book boards, sew the Coptic stitch, and use found papers to enhance the inside of a book. Appropriate for all skill levels.
Leader: Bryant Holsenbeck, www.bryantholsenbeck.com
Cost: \$75 for 3-part workshop (plus \$10 materials fee)
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

March 12–14, 2010
WOMENSPEAK 2010
Mobile Convention Center, Mobile, AL
Leaders: Dr Jean Shinoda Bolen, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Joyce Rupp, Sherry Ruth Anderson, and more.
Contact: www.womenspeak2010.com

*March 14, 2010, Sunday afternoon (TBA)
SPECIAL SHOWING: *For the Next Seven Generations*
The Varsity on Franklin, Chapel Hill, NC
You won't want to miss this inspiring documentary film about the International Council of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers. For more information about the film: www.forthenext7generations.com.
Sponsors: Lynne Jaffe and RCWMS
Cost: \$13
Reservations required: lynnejaffe@gmail.com

*March 17–April 28, 2010, six Wednesdays (not meeting April 7), 7:00–9:00 pm
WRITING FROM THE DEEP PLACES
1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
How can we begin to tell the deepest truths of our lives? How can we come to terms with difficulties we have experienced—pain, grief, regret, loss—and gain new perspectives that lead to healing and growth? How can we listen most compassionately to our inner voices, our authentic selves, that point us toward our own strength and wisdom? Join us for writing in a non-judgmental, safe and nourishing circle, inspired by a variety of prompts.
Leader: Liz Dowling-Sendor, Episcopal priest and RCWMS Writer in Residence
Cost: \$120
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*March 25–29, 2010
WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Live a Soul-Centered Life in Your 50s, 60s, and beyond!
More women are entering their 50s, 60s, and 70s with



Books by Bryant Holsenbeck

higher levels of education, work experience, and resources than ever before in history. We have choices our mothers and grandmothers couldn't dream of, and still we often find ourselves asking, "Who am I, really? What am I called to be doing with my life?" Answering those questions is our soul's work. Each of us was born with a gift to give to the world, and as we grow older, the need to uncover and fully express it can grow more urgent. In this retreat for women, we'll explore how to follow our soul's calling in midlife through our elder years. Journal writing, sacred conversation, simple art projects, and the healing presence of nature will help us connect with what nourishes and guides us as we create our own vision of growing into the wisdom of our years.
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori
Cost: \$500 for a single, \$475 for a double
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*March 26–27, 2010, Fri. 7–9 pm & Sat. 9:30 am–3:30 pm
RE-IMAGINING our LIFE STORIES in FACT & FICTION: Reflective Writing Workshop with Carol Henderson
Durham, NC

In this workshop, we will explore our life stories and myths and find fresh meaning in them. We'll write character portraits, scenes from childhood, dreams, and dialogues. We'll use different points of view to uncover rich perspectives, our own crisp voices, and our own lively prose. We will explore fiction and nonfiction and consider where the two intersect. Come prepared to write a lot in response to a series of evocative prompts. You'll leave with a whole new way of seeing yourself and the world and plenty of new writing skills and ideas. Open to women and men of all skill levels and genres.

Leader: Carol Henderson teaches writing workshops and coaches writers. Her memoir, *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, is a redemptive story about the loss of a baby. She lives in Chapel Hill, NC. Learn more about her: www.carolhenderson.com.
Cost: \$125
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

March 26–28, 2010
THE PAINTING EXPERIENCE
Garden Hills Pool and Rec Center, Atlanta, GA
The power inherent in painting can awaken a wild vein of passion that will not go back to sleep. All are welcome.
Leaders: Stewart Cubley & Annie Danberg
Sponsor: Georgia Art Therapy Association
Cost: \$350, all materials supplied
Contact: www.processarts.com, or Virginia, 404-272-3890

*March 28–April 2, 2010
ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches
Free and open to the public.
Contact: beth@binkleychurch.org or rcwmsnc@aol.com

*April 9–10, 2010, Friday 7–9 pm & Saturday 9 am–4 pm
ENNEAGRAM WORKSHOP
4024 Kerley Rd, Durham, NC
The Enneagram Personality System offers a map of nine personality types, their perspectives and blind spots and the direction for individual growth and transformation.
Leader: Sandra Smith, M.Div., certified Enneagram trainer and founder of Holy Ground.
Cost: \$100
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 2–9, 2010
WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week of writing for women.
Cost: \$680, includes room and meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Rich

by Judith Valerie

"Stuck in Jackson, Mississippi." I re-read the words I'd printed, big and bold, in my journal. My ex-husband had brought me here twelve years earlier from England. Now I was divorced, burnt out with work. My daughter was staying with her dad and his family in New Orleans, and I needed to get out of the Deep South.

The one sure thing I had, after a decade of yoga classes, was a great love of yoga. I yearned to learn more about yogic lifestyles and earn my living as a yoga teacher.

Instead of interviewing for another university position and continuing up the career ladder, I decided to spend July in a study program at a yoga ashram in Pennsylvania. I hoped immersing myself in yoga classes, meditation instruction, and yoga philosophy for a whole month would help me figure out how to get out of my rut and find a new creative niche somewhere in the USA.

The ashram was housed in a former monastery, surrounded by gardens and fields. The Indian guru-swami in charge of the place was tall, debonair, and well-educated. From afar I studied his interactions with program participants, Indian visitors, colleagues, and tennis opponents. Some shook his hand, some bowed, and some kissed his feet. I cringed when I saw the Swami pat his afternoon tennis fans on the head as he imparted pearls of wisdom.

Swami was very stylish. I glimpsed him a few times in elegantly tailored suits striding down hallways, in full-length saffron robes cross-legged on his throne-like chair during Saturday night talks, and in polished tennis whites for his daily game. One night he phoned a woman in my wing on the hallway phone, waking us all up at 4:00 AM with an errand. I imagined him reclining on a couch, wearing maroon and gold silk pajamas, a long matching gown, and handmade slippers.

I avoided the Swami as much as possible. Instead I picked the brains of the American and Indian teachers, men wearing western suits and ties or traditional Indian dress. They gave us lectures from books they had written on yoga philosophy, stress management practices, and the traditional yogic diet.

The days consisted of hatha yoga, meditation, vegetarian meals, lectures, and karma yoga: cleaning, cooking, and sharing the ashram work. We weren't allowed off the grounds.

At first I found ashram life extremely oppressive. No hair dryers before 7:00 AM. No showers after 9:00 PM. No talking at mealtimes. Lights out 10:00 PM. One breakfast I sat opposite a long, lean, ashramite, chewing his oatmeal 80-plus times, with his eyes lowered. I couldn't face my oatmeal. I left the dining hall and escaped to the woods. As I walked and swung my arms, a chant emerged. "Rules. Rules, ruddy, bloody rules." I repeated the phrase over and over in time with my stride. The faster I walked, the louder the chant became, and I imagined the ashramites in the silent dining room chewing to the rhythm of my rebellious chorus. I burst out laughing and my attitude lightened up. I remembered this was their home and I was just visiting briefly.

I decided to focus on learning all I could, as I'd originally planned. I interviewed the teachers, studied bio-feedback, practiced numerous breathing techniques, and learned gobs of yoga philosophy. My group gave me a prize for making the most of all the program's resources. Some of us even snuck out for pizza and beer one evening.

At the end of the month I could do a fancier headstand, cook Indian dhal, recite facts about doshas, koshas, and chakras, but I was no clearer how to move out of Mississippi and support myself somewhere new teaching yoga.

At my last Saturday night satsang, everyone was singing the Sanskrit chants before Swami's talk. I sang with passion and became more and more energized. The rhythms and melodies stirred me. I needed to move my arms, sway my



Judith Valerie

spine and wiggle my bum. I thought I'd burst if I didn't get up and dance. Dancing was forbidden at the ashram.

Suddenly, I couldn't sit still a second longer. I stood, strode upstairs to my monastic cell, opened the window to hear the music, and danced. I sang, clapped, and twirled. As I huffed and puffed, a powerful energy built inside me. When the music ended, I was trembling. Was I angry? I banged the window shut and began ranting at the blank white wall. "I've been here almost a month," I raged. "I've put up with all the ruddy rules and regulations, but I haven't got what I came for. I still don't know diddly-poop about how to move forward in my life."

I paused, stood taller, and addressed the Swami's essence through the wall. "I admit, Swami, I haven't liked you from the start, haven't fawned 'round kissing your feet, haven't gazed adoringly at your tennis game. But, damnit, Swami." I slowed and spoke with a new authority. "I want something now. I want an amazing new awareness. I want an, um, a multi-million-dollar-moment." I shook my finger at the wall. "And I'm not hunting you down, Swami. You're gonna find me." I smiled, savored my monologue and got tickled at my audacity. I was certainly no longer the polite, compliant Brit I'd been brought up to be. Satisfied, I lay down in the narrow bed and slept.

For my work-study karma yoga the next afternoon, I was cleaning the bathrooms in the health center. I stepped into the empty hallway, pulling my trolley of towels and cleaning supplies. Suddenly, all six-feet-plus of the Swami was towering in front of me. He wore his long saffron robes. I couldn't see a door; he was just suddenly there, staring down into my face. His forehead crinkled with horizontal furrows, his eyebrows pinched over his nose, and his eyes were popping out on stalks. I caught my breath. Should I shake his hand? Kiss his feet? Curtsey?

He looked as furious as I'd been the night before. Staring into my eyes, he looked through me to the back of my head. "Lady," he growled. He spoke five words as if underlining every one. "Lady," he said, "you are very rich." What? I snickered, embarrassed. Rich rhymed with bitch. It wasn't for people like me.

I looked away, saw my trolley, and quipped, "Yes, I'm rich in towels." Swami wasn't amused. He stepped even closer and glared down on me. "Lady," he repeated with more vigor. "You...are...very...very...RICH." A tingling shot through my head. The workings of a wind-up clock flashed across my mind. Was he re-setting something mechanical inside my brain?

I turned away again and touched one of the towels. *I AM rich in towels!* I thought to myself. *And I'm rich in friends, and life experiences, and resourcefulness. I'm rich in courage, rich in health.* I turned back to tell the Swami I understood, but he was gone. The hallway was empty.

For days afterward, I wrote lists. "I'm rich in stories, rich in poetry, rich in words. I'm rich in rhythms, melodies, dance-moves. In fact, my whole life is rich with all sorts of possibilities and opportunities, no matter where I go."

When I returned to Jackson, Mississippi, still vibrating with this new awareness, I held a garage sale, tuned up my twelve-year-old Toyota, and took off to find my niche. A sense of rightness and richness remained as I travelled.

I arrived in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the beginning of February 1990. In March of 2010, I'll celebrate my twentieth anniversary of teaching yoga as my livelihood. I am enormously grateful for the strong spiritual surgery I experienced at the ashram. It gave me determination, hope, and courage and revolutionized my sense of abundance.

When I find myself worrying about the economy, health insurance, or my small business, I try to step out into the rich world of nature or find beauty in another person's eyes. The goodness of gratitude seeps back into my brain, breath, and bones. Feel free to remind me lest I forget!

Judith Valerie grew up in England and now lives in Raleigh where she teaches yoga (www.jvyoga.com). She loves performing "JV's One Woman Show & Tell," sharing adventure-mystery stories from her travels.

Duke Div...

That potluck was the first time I had felt safe since moving to Durham. I never felt unsafe in a physical sense—daily life in the Divinity School was fine. I went to class, enjoyed challenging lectures, chatted with classmates, hit my new favorite cafe for a cappuccino and Greek homework, went home to cuddle with my cat, and got up to do it again the next day. In some ways, I was in intellectual heaven. But that potluck was the first place where I felt I could let down my guard, where God was addressed with something other than male pronouns, and where people understood my outrage at having been told by a male classmate that women in Divinity School are “just looking for husbands.” It was the first place I felt I could say what I really thought and how I really felt. We ate and drank; we laughed and some of us cried that night. I made friends with folks who helped me survive my first year of graduate school.

At the Women’s Center 35th Anniversary celebration, many women spoke of their feminist “awakenings” or “conversions,” the joys and sorrows of their faith journeys, and the role Duke played—sometimes supportive and sometimes providing obstacles they were forced to overcome.

I found the 35th Anniversary inspiring, challenging, eye-opening, and, at times, heartbreaking. Elizabeth Clift’s sermon on the dry bones in Ezekiel breathed new life into my own dry bones, opening my heart to the brokenness of women who continue to suffer, challenging me to envision new life in their dry bones. Jill Raitt’s surprise and joy at the announcement of a new lecture series bearing her name made me proud to be a Duke graduate. The stories of other women graduates made me thankful for the women who came before me, many of whom faced more difficulties than I have, while leaving me outraged at the many things that still have not changed. Theresa Berger’s lecture on women in liturgical tradition was deeply satisfying, since I had rarely heard lectures in DDS classrooms that included women’s stories. Her comment about the “add women and stir... or don’t even bother to stir” approach to church history summed up my graduate school experience and helped me imagine a better way.

I was inspired by the presence of these women, amazed at their gumption and grace in a place that fostered their growth, sometimes in painful ways. The greatest gift of the 35th anniversary celebration came in these women’s stories, in the opportunity to listen, talk with, and observe women whose lives combine the things I have been trying to reconcile since my “tom-boy” days in junior high school. Even now, I get up some mornings and think, “I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know how to be a feminist and a Christian.” These women do it every day, and knowing them, I am able to envision a different future, one where the women who come after me will not have to argue with their advisors about taking gender courses, one where students will not have to be nervous to raise questions about gender in class, one where God is not a man and men are not gods.



Meghan Florian, Jeanette Stokes, & Jenny Graves
photo by Amy Kellum

Writers

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2009 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Judith Valerie of Raleigh, NC. You can read her essay, “Rich,” and learn more about her on page three. Second place goes to Marion Thulberry of Durham, NC. Marion is an Episcopal priest and a supervising chaplain at the V.A. Hospital in Durham. Many thanks go to the judges: Liz Dowling-Sendor, Sarah Walls, and Betty Wolfe.

For regular support and nourishment for your writing, sign up for *Writing from the Deep Places*, Wednesdays, March 17–April 28, 7:00–9:00 pm. The writing group is led by Liz Dowling-Sendor, who is an Episcopal priest and the RCWMS Writer in Residence. She will help participants listen compassionately to their inner voices and write from their own strength and wisdom. See the calendar for more information.

For two days of writing inspiration, join us for *Mining for Gold: A Reflective Writing Workshop* with Carol Henderson on March 27–28. We’ll do lots of writing and come away with new skills and ideas. People raved about the workshop she led for us last March. I was among those who produced some useful work at the workshop. See the calendar for more details.

RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a 32-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. In the past, RCWMS sponsored workshops, conferences, and retreats on women and religion, equal rights, economic justice, healthcare, and violence against women and children. The organization has mentored and encouraged young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists. In recent years we have developed programs about art, writing, creativity, and spirituality.

The RCWMS Board appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock to the Resource Center. Your support allows us to continue offering our resources and programs. We are grateful for support from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation, the Kalliopeia Foundation, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, and the E. Rhodes and Lona B. Carpenter Foundation. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer, contact RCWMS or see us on the web at www.rcwms.org.

RCWMS Board of Trustees: Debra Brazzel, Amy Kellum, Marya McNeish, Lori Pistor, Courtney Reid-Eaton, Candice Ryals Provey, Sarah Walls, Betty Wolfe

Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director
Jennifer McGovern, Administrative Director
Meghan Florian, Intern
Liz Dowling-Sendor, Writer in Residence



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.

YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 1003 = 2010 March.

ISSN 0890-7676
www.rcwms.org rcwmsnc@aol.com 919.683.1236

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

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