

South of the Garden

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

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August 2015

Protest

by Jeanette Stokes

"Why don't you go back to the church of Satan that you run?" Sheriff Glen Smith said to United Methodist pastor Hannah Bonner while she sat outside the Waller County Jail. Say what?

Rev. Hannah Bonner had been sitting in protest outside the jail since July 15, 2015, two days after Sandra Bland was found dead in a cell inside that jail. Bland, who had been stopped for a minor traffic violation, was arrested, jailed for several days, and died in her cell. Her death was ruled a suicide by a local coroner—death by hanging.

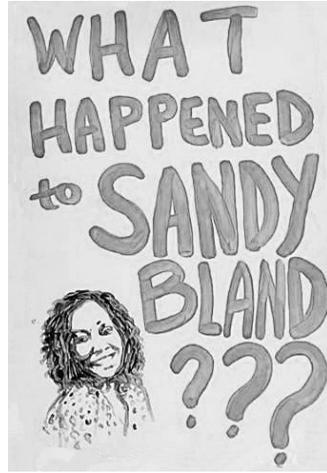
When Hannah Bonner, who serves a United Methodist church in Houston, heard about the death, she must have said to herself, "This isn't right. I've got to get over there." She knew about the dangers of "driving while Black" and that too many people of color have died in interactions with police or while in custody. So two days after Sandra Bland died, Hannah Bonner drove the thirty miles to Waller County to join other concerned citizens at a protest outside the jail. She went back the next day, and the next, and the next. At this writing, Hannah Bonner has been outside the jail every day for thirty-five days.

Bonner has never been the only one protesting. Local people, clergy from various denominations, people from around Texas, came to protest. Some days there were three or four people; other days, there were dozens. Every day, the protestors held a simple sign that asks, "What happened to Sandra Bland?" They took to saying, "We hear you Sandra!" and "Sandra is still speaking." Bland was a spirited and outspoken activist who wrote inspirational messages for others in the movement for racial justice on her Facebook page.

It's hot in Waller County, Texas, located about thirty miles from Houston on the road to Austin. For several weeks, the protestors got along with the sheriff's department personnel well enough, sitting in the shade of the building that housed the jail. They greeted the sheriff and deputies as they went in and out of the building, and no one fussed when they went inside to use the restroom. But after Sunday, August 9, things changed. Some of the Sunday protestors got noisy, went inside the building, and got pushed around by deputies. The next day, Sheriff Glen Smith was videoed saying to Bonner, "A lot of this will change in the morning." That would have been enough, but he also added that bit about the "church of Satan."

That got the story written up on the AP wire, in the Washington Post, in the Independent and in papers around the country and the world. The comment also elicited letters from United Methodists, one of which pointed out how many United Methodists there are in the Waller County area, folks he had just insulted.

(Continued inside.)



Justice?

by Molly Williams

Early on the morning of May 9, 2002, Reginald Reeves processed into a quiet room and situated himself in the proper place. With the attention of a small congregation, he delivered his message, "I pray that we all may learn to love and forgive so that we can have peace in the world. It is with love and forgiveness and living to learn to love that we can learn the power of forgiveness and learn to live as brothers and sisters on this earth...God dwells within us and we are all one big family of humanity; we must all learn to love and live together." These profound words appear to be an excerpt of a preacher's Sunday morning sermon. However, they were spoken by a person who is often labeled a monster, a person considered to be the lowest of the low in our country, a person whom a majority of Americans still believe deserves to die: a death row inmate.

During my senior year at the University of North Carolina I undertook two fulfilling and challenging projects. One was an internship at the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South; the other, my senior honors thesis in Sociology, a qualitative analysis of the use of religious language and imagery in the final statements of executed persons. Both projects involved a great deal of learning, many conversations, and opportunities for growth. My internship at the Resource Center grew out of my fascination with feminism and religion. The thesis sprang from my interest in criminal justice and led me to a heightened interest in the death penalty and anti-death penalty activism.

Despite a recent decrease in support, fifty-five percent of adults in the United States still favor the death penalty. When differentiated by race, we find that close to sixty percent of white people are in favor of the death penalty, while support among black people is a much lower thirty-six percent. Given the history of the death penalty in America, these numbers are not surprising. The death penalty originated as a tool for racial control. In Southern colonies, such as South Carolina and Virginia, it was widely used against blacks, both enslaved and freed. Legislatures in South Carolina imposed the death penalty for a long list of "crimes" that included the destruction of crops or manufactured goods by blacks.

The pervasive use of the death penalty against blacks continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in Southern states, as whites viewed black people as threatening and thus in need of restraint. In *At the Hands of the Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, Philip Dray shares the comment of one pro-lynching activist: "If it takes lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from drunken, ravening human beasts...then I say lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary."

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

*September 8, 2015, Tuesday, 11:30 am–2:00 pm
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING
Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd., Durham, NC
Topic: How is it going? Where to from here.
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Doris Sigl
Bring a bag lunch. Newcomers welcome.
No fee to attend. No need to register.

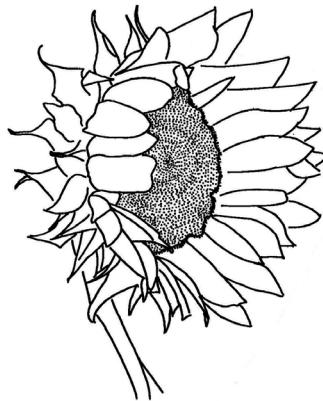
*September 19, 2015, Saturday, 10:00 am–1:00 pm
WRITING WITH SPIRIT: A Workshop with Nancy Kilgore
RCWMS office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
For any level of writer, this workshop is about opening to a deeper creativity by combining meditation and writing. Mindfulness helps us to find a way of opening, to become comfortable with the parts of ourselves that we normally avoid, and then in creative writing to find expression of the insights gained. We will use a variety of guided meditations to lead us into the writing of our stories, poems, novels-in-progress, or creative nonfiction.

Leader: Nancy Kilgore is a writer and psychotherapist in Hanover, NH. Her first novel, *Sea Level*, is about a small town on the southern seacoast and its new woman minister.
Cost: \$50
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 20, 2015, Sunday, 1:30–5:00 pm
CONSCIOUS ELDERING: Going Deeper Series
In a comfortable home in Durham with a cat
Third in a three-part series focusing on the powerful inner work of creating an elderhood rich in meaning, passion and wisdom. Come to some or all sessions.
Topic: Finding Passion and Purpose with Stacy Grove and Sherylyn Pitt
Cost: \$110 for the series or \$45 per session.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 20–27, 2015
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Wouldn't you like a week full of quiet days to think and write? Come spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women in Pelican House, at the beautiful Trinity Center on Emerald Isle, NC. We observe silence in the daytime so participants can read, write, or rest. In the evenings we gather to reflect on the day and often share our work with one another. Room and meals are included. Everyone gets her own room. Her own space. Her own time.
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 30–October 21, 2015 (4 Wed.) 6:30–8:00 pm
UNLOCKING YOUR CREATIVITY
Community Church of Chapel Hill, 106 Purefoy Rd., Chapel Hill, NC
We might feel called to write but not know what to write about or where to begin. In this class, we will use unusual prompts and writing exercises to spark our imaginations and access our best ideas. Readings and homework will stimulate creative juices between classes. Whether you've just begun to explore writing or want to get out of a creative rut, this class will activate your senses and invigorate your expression.
Leader: Julia Green, MFA in fiction writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop
Cost: \$75.
Contact: RCWMS, rcwmsnc@aol.com
Questions: Julia Green, julia.green@gmail.com



*October 1–4, 2015, Thurs. 7:00 pm–Sunday 3:00 pm
HERONS WALK ON WATER'S EDGE, A Retreat
Cedar Cross Retreat Center, Louisburg, NC (north of Raleigh) www.cedarcrossretreat.org
Returning to nature may be the most powerful reciprocal healing medicine of our time. It ignites awe and wonder in the Sacredness of "all our relations" and rekindles a sense of belonging and groundedness. This intergenerational retreat will offer contemplative, mindful, and ceremonial practices in the natural world. We will return to a natural pace, utilizing wisdom rooted in intuition, imagination, and bodily sensations. We will gather in circle to strengthen and restore our relationship with our authentic selves and the natural world.
Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod
Cost: \$475. (Single, \$60 extra.) Includes room & food. Limited scholarships available.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 12, 2015, Monday, 7:00–9:00 pm
NOT THE JESUS I KNEW: Lord's Prayer Revisited
"Oh, Birther! Father/Mother of the Cosmos, You create all that moves in light," is one translation of the first line of the traditional Lord's Prayer. Using Sufi teacher Neil Douglas-Klotz's Aramaic work, Elizabeth Reed will reveal this prayer as a call to an inclusive theology and spiritual practice towards liberation.
Leader: Elizabeth Reed, PhD, founded and directs the interfaith Shalem Center in Columbus, Ohio. She is a psychotherapist, spiritual director, retired United Methodist minister and ordained Sufi cheraq.
Cost: \$25
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 22–23, 2015, Thursday & Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
In an ecumenical spirit of collegiality, we'll lift up the voices of local clergywomen to inspire, learn, and hone our craft. We'll hear wonderful preaching and discuss the art of proclamation in all its forms. We'll pray, eat, worship, and celebrate together. Rev. Dr. Debra Mumford, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary will be a featured preacher.
Info: ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com
Contact: meghanrcwms@gmail.com

*October 26–Nov. 16, 2015 (4 Mondays) 7:00–9:00 pm
TURNING POINTS: An Intergenerational Writing Workshop
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
What have been those *oh shit!* moments in your life? Did they turn into *aha!* moments as the dust settled and life took on a different shape than before? Where do you find yourself now in life's labyrinth? What do you wish you could tell your past or future self? We'll explore these questions, using writing as a spiritual and self-revelatory practice. We'll learn together in a supportive, intergenerational community of women, however we self-identify. We'll reflect on ancient images of the Maiden/Mother/Crone archetype, while finding new ways to envision our unique and universal spiraling journeys through life. Workshop dates: Oct. 26, Nov. 2, 9, and 16.
Leaders: Anita McLeod, director of RCWMS Elder Women Project, and Rebecca Welper, MFA
Cost: Sliding scale, \$35–\$100. (Please pay an amount near your age. Under 35, pay \$35 or more; 70 years old, pay \$70 or more; etc.) Scholarships available.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Protest...

On the day following the egregious comment, protesters arrived at the jail to find concrete and wooden barricades blocking the shady areas next to the building, so Bonner and others sat in the shade of a nearby tree. That evening, the tree was cut down along with some other trees on the property. Now protestors sit under umbrellas.

DeRay Mckesson, one of the lead organizers of the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, has said protests like the one in Waller County, Texas are keeping the Black Lives Matter movement alive. Such protests are crucial, because we don't live in a post-racial society. We live in a racist society, a fact that painfully greets African Americans, Hispanics and other people of color every single day.

Calendar...

*October 28, 2015, Wednesday, 7:00 pm

READING by Linda Beatrice Brown

Brown will read from *A Mother Knows Her Child*, her book of poems that illuminates a Mother Mary that has not been fully explored. During the reading, Brown will reveal new ways to see the Divine Feminine and to affirm that power within ourselves. Linda Beatrice Brown is the retired Distinguished Professor of the Humanities, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC. She is the author of three novels, *Rainbow 'Round Mah Shoulder*, *Crossing Over Jordan*, and *Black Angels*. Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*December 20, 2015, 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

*February 19-21, 2016, Friday, 2 pm-Sunday, 2 pm

FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon

Emerald Isle, NC

"I can't draw a straight line." Well, who said you should? Sue Sneddon will help you explore various media for painting and drawing, including: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, and mixed media. Find the ones that float your boat! Sue will provide all art supplies needed for the workshop. Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a full-time painter since 1984. Much of her work has concentrated on the ocean, especially the NC coast, where she now lives.

Cost: Workshop & food, \$375, plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*February 26-29, 2016, Friday 7:00 pm-Mon. 10:00 am

MAKING YOUR ART: An Advanced Workshop with Sue Sneddon

Emerald Isle, NC

For those who've taken Sue's "Finding Your Medium."

Leader: Sue Sneddon (See February 19-21.)

Cost: Workshop & meals \$400 plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

January 1-8, 2016

May 8-15, 2016



Justice?...

The words are hauntingly echoed by Dylann Roof's statement before he murdered nine people of color at Mother Emanuel AME church in Charleston, SC: "You rape our women, and you're taking over our country, and you have to go."

It is a narrative our country knows well. White men act as if they own white women and use their racist fear to justify the murder and lynching of black men, ostensibly to "protect" white women from blackness. The Springfield race riot of 1908, Tulsa race riots of 1921, Rosewood massacre of 1923, Scottsboro lynch mob of 1931, the Detroit race riots of 1943, and the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, all began with a suspected rape or assault on a white woman. In each case, the salvation of a white woman's inviolable body was used as an excuse to murder and destroy the black body. At times, the murder and lynching of black men was used to eliminate white men's discomfort with consensual relationships between white women and black men, as it was believed that no white woman would consent to relations with a black man. As a white woman from the South, I find the racist violence perpetuated in my name especially horrifying.

Murder in the name of protection, security, and peace disproportionately harms people of color—whether it takes the form of police brutality, racist hate crimes, or the death penalty. The ideals that fueled the racist hate crime in Charleston are similar to the narrative that created and perpetuates the death penalty; blacks continue to be overrepresented on death row. Forty-two percent of the death row population is black, while blacks account for less than fourteen percent of the national population. The death penalty, which began as a tool for racial control, is now entrenched in a revenge-seeking society and masked as justice.

I was not surprised when South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley called for the death penalty less than forty-eight hours after the massacre in Charleston. While it is easy to view Dylann Roof's punishment in isolation from the racist systems that created the death penalty, we must remember that the death penalty for this white man does not represent a step towards racial justice in our country but the continuation of an institution created to control, punish, and kill people of color.

Suggestions for further reading:

The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander

The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance, Danielle McGuire

Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates

Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the

Meaning of Liberty, Dorothy Roberts

Are Prisons Obsolete? Angela Davis

Molly Williams is a native of Birmingham, AL, and a 2015 graduate of UNC where she studied Sociology and Public Policy. She was awarded a Fulbright to teach English in Malaysia beginning in January 2016. Afterwards, she plans to attend divinity school to further explore the intersections of religion, race, and gender.



See a review of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* on the back page of this newsletter. The review is written by RCWMS trustee Marcy Litle.

Jim Crow

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, Michelle Alexander (New Press, 2010)

Last fall, a small group of women at RCWMS read *The New Jim Crow* together over several weeks. This was after the shooting of Michael Brown, before decisions by grand juries not to indict the police officer who killed him, nor the officer responsible for the death of Eric Garner. The book, which came out in 2010, offers a powerful challenge to conventional wisdom about the current state of race and civil rights. Since then the ACLU has taken up the cause of mass incarceration and states have begun to reconsider their harsh and unequally administered marijuana laws. Since then many thousands of Americans have become more active in the struggle against racism in our society. For our intergenerational group of white women the book was a revelation, a powerful and persuasive indictment of the persistence of the systemic racial bias that is still woven into the fabric of our country.

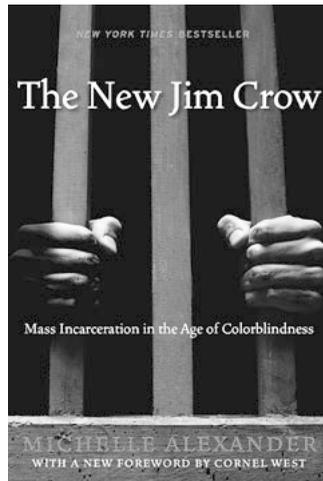
Alexander does not provide answers, though she does provide a few suggestions about how we can recover. She does give a clear exposition of her argument about the widespread and, for those who do not live it, often hidden impact of the tidal wave of mass incarceration that has overtaken our country since the 1980s. This argument is most clearly laid out in the book's opening and closing chapters. In between she provides a concise history of the three historical phases of systemic racial oppression—slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration—and how they are linked. The heart of the book is a detailed, and thoroughly documented, account of the way the current system works to create a stigmatized underclass. In the end, she calls on us to undertake the struggle to see all people as completely human, even those who have been branded "criminal." At the same time, she argues that we must do this while also overcoming our collective unwillingness to acknowledge race, and our assumptions that racism has somehow been overcome.

This is the most eye-opening book that I've read in a long time. I urge you to read it.

Marcy Litle is a member of the board of trustees of RCWMS.



To read more reviews of our favorite books and media, take a look at our blog, *Words & Spirit* <http://wordsandspirit.tumblr.com>. We'd love to hear what you think and what books you'd recommend!



Essay Contest

The 2016 RCWMS Essay Contest opens on October 15.

THEME: Essays should focus on the theme "Experiencing White Supremacy." We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. How have your experiences been shaped by being privileged or oppressed by institutional or other forms of racism in our country? How do your intersecting identities affect your faith, values, work, or spiritual practices? How have you addressed or worked to dismantle racism in your family, your religious community, or your city?

DETAILS: Women 18 years of age or older may submit up to 2 nonfiction essays, 1400 words or less. Submit online only: <https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit>. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members 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 October 15, 2015 and close January 15, 2016.

PRIZES: \$300 for first place, \$200 second, and \$100 third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, March 2016.

NOTIFICATION: Winners will be notified by email.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-eight-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. We are especially grateful for support of the Kalliopeia Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, A-Squared Fund of Triangle Community Foundation, and the estate of Nancy Ann Monte Santo.

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