

South of the Garden

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

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Winter

by Jeanette Stokes

The recent election reminds me of the importance of the long view. Though I worry about the impact federal decisions may have on this country and our most vulnerable residents, I remember that this is not the end. What we do today, how we treat one another and how we work together all matter now and in the future.

At RCWMS we continue to create opportunities to gather, support one another, reflect, celebrate and plan for the future.

In August, RCWMS hosted a fundraising event in Durham for our *Jereann King Johnson Documentary Project*. After showing sample footage from early filming for the project, director Courtney Reid-Eaton and Jereann King Johnson shared reflections on the process so far. An educator, community organizer, and quilter in Warrenton, NC, Jereann works for justice and equity every day. We are making a film about her because we believe her beautiful creations and her dedication to community uplift can be an inspiration to others.

In late September MJ Sharp, the Resource Center's Artist in Residence, hosted a gathering of people to discuss an uncomfortable topic: suffering. As we looked at MJ's large format photographs of dead insects trapped on sticky paper, we began to reflect on struggle, suffering, and death. When MJ came upon these old papers in a family home, she was confronted by their starkness, took photographs of them, and began to think more deeply about what it means to look at death so directly.

In October RCWMS partnered with the Pauli Murray Center and Hayti Heritage Center for a screening of *gOD-Talk* (2023). The film, made by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, explores the experiences of Black millennials and the decline of millennial participation in mainline religious traditions. Raising questions about the relevance of organized religion to the lives of young Black adults, the film concludes that when religious institutions don't address topics that are important to young adults, they drift away. Though this engaging film focuses on the Black church, it also touches on Islam, Baha'i, Buddhism, and African Traditional Religions. Read more about the film on the museum's website and watch for future opportunities to view it.

We are excited about our plans for *Kindred Spirits: A Convergence of African American Quilters 2025*. After the first Kindred Spirits in 2023, people expressed great enthusiasm for doing it again, and we listened. The 2025 event will take place June 19-21 at the Durham Convention Center. To support the event, search the web for: *Indiegogo Kindred Spirits: African American Quilters* or go to www.rcwms.org and click DONATE. Stay tuned for updates and registration details.



Carry On!

by Jeanette Stokes

I had gotten used to the possibility that the USA might elect its first woman president, and a woman of color at that. I heard so many stories about relatives of friends who would break long-held habits and would vote for her. I clung to the encouraging words of writers like Heather Cox Richardson and Michael Moore. And I kept saying, "The women of this country will not let *that guy* get elected again."

On election night I entertained myself by quilting. I tried to get my sewing machine to do a free motion stitching (where the fabric moves freely under the needle) but it wouldn't cooperate. I was so nervous, I couldn't remember the steps to set up the machine for that kind of stitching. So instead, between refreshing the website of the NC Board of Elections (NCBE) and talking with friends, I stitched parallel curves in a large blank section of a quilt. The pattern pleased me as it emerged on the fabric on the sewing machine. The emerging national election results did not.

I stayed up too late watching for results. The story I was hearing from trusted media and from results on the NCBE website was stunning. I had thought there were so many of us. The polls show that the majority of people in this country favor legal access to abortion. How could a majority vote for the guy who stacked the Supreme Court against a woman's right to choose? Did they not vote? Did they have temporary amnesia in the voting booth? What happened?

By the next morning I was starting to believe the results. This country had elected *that guy* again. I couldn't understand how it was possible. He is a convicted (though not sentenced) felon. He has been accused of assaulting women. He is a sexist and a racist, and would sell the environment to the highest bidder. He seemed to be controlled by whoever would put the most money into his campaign. And he ran on a flimsy platform of mass deportations and higher tariffs. Anyone who understands the first thing about business or economics will tell you that raising tariffs will raise consumer prices. What was the appeal? I thought he didn't have enough die-hard supporters to make up a majority of the electorate.

The results were even more confusing in North Carolina where we elected responsible people as governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction. A close look at NC voter data reveals that many people split their tickets, switching back and forth between political parties as they worked their way down their ballots. That's fine, but too many voted for a good governor and *that guy* for president. I kept shaking my head in disbelief.

Since election night, I've been doing what people with a lot of higher education do. I've been attending events and reading whatever I could find that tried to explain what happened.

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. More info: rcwms.org/events.

Now through January 25, 2025

MAYA FREELON Exhibition at Stagville
Historic Stagville, 5828 Old Oxford Rd., Durham, NC
Maya Freelon: Whippersnappers, a moving exhibition focused on the lives of enslaved children, includes large-scale sculptures, archival photographs, paintings, and collages that transform a former plantation. It will be on view through January 25, 2025, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 10:00 am–1:00 pm and by appointment. Viewings by appointment: stagville@dncr.nc.gov.

*December 10, 2024, 2nd Tues., 11:30 am–1:30 pm (Zoom)
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women
In this meeting we'll review the past year's programs and set topics and leaders for 2025. Newcomers welcome. No fee to attend. No need to register. For more info: RCWMS, info@rcwms.org.

*December 13, 2024, Friday, 9:00 pm Deadline
QUEER DIVINITY STUDENTS: Thriving in the South
Applications are due Dec.13 for the RCWMS 2025 queer divinity cohort. This four-month, virtual, peer-supported cohort (8 participants) will be led by an experienced facilitator. See back page for more details.

*December 14, 2024, 2:00–4:00 pm
REMEMBERING THOSE WE MISS with Shawna Ayoub @ Trinity Ave. Presbyterian, Durham, NC
Writing letters can be a heartfelt way to express our love and celebrate the relationships we've shared. Letters can help us preserve important memories and stories, confront unfinished business, and expose ourselves to things we may be avoiding. This is especially true when we are writing to those who are gone from our lives, whether they have passed on or passed on us. In this workshop, we will come together to examine our grief through the epistolary form. In a safe and supportive space, we will write letters to those we have lost as an act of self-care. Writers will be welcome to share work with the instructor for private feedback after the course. Leader: Shawna Ayoub is a brown, queer, Durham-based writer and instructor. Cost: \$100 or \$125. Scholarships available. Register: www.rcwms.org, contact: info@rcwms.org.

*December 15, 2025, Sunday, 1:00 –5:00 pm
RCWMS HOLIDAY SALE
1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC
Handmade cards, books, jewelry, textiles, animals, etc. by local artists. Come by to visit, to see our art, and to buy great gifts. Bring friends and family. A portion of the proceeds from sales will benefit RCWMS. Masks encouraged. For more information, email: info@rcwms.org.

*December 18, 2024, 7:00–8:30 pm (3rd Wednesdays)
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE:
A Series with Kim McCrae (via Zoom)
Allowing our bodies, minds, and spirits to break down in the course of doing our work puts ourselves and our work at risk. This series offers practical tools for everyday self-care to Black women-identified folks. December theme: *Perspective—Reflections on the Journey*. Leader: Kimberly (Gaubault) McCrae
Cost: \$10–\$40.
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

December 19, 2024, 7:00 pm (3rd Thursday)
TARA PRACTICE (Free & via Zoom)

(Continued next column.)

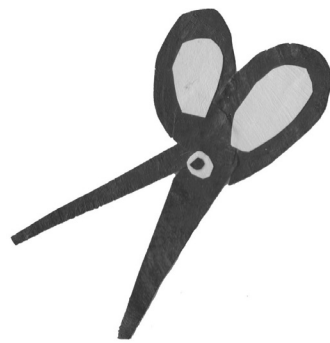


Illustration by Clara Kewley

Teachings & guided meditation, drawing on Wooten's book *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*.
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, and Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher.
More: www.rachaelwootenauthor.com/practices

*January 2–9, 2024, Thursday–Thursday
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING for Women
Pelican House, Trinity Center, near Emerald Isle, NC
Spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women at the beautiful Trinity Center. We are mostly silent during the day so you can read, write, or rest, and we share our writing in the evenings.
Leader: Jeanette Stokes
Cost: about \$980. Single room & meals included.
Contact: jeanette@rcwms.org

*January 29, 2025, Wednesday, 6:30–8:00 pm
QUARTERLY HEALTH & WELLBING SERIES, first of 4 sessions with Solita Denard (via Zoom)
What do you need to take the next step to improve your personal health? Join us for an integrated approach! This series is designed for individuals who will benefit from learning in community and will commit to practice moving toward their own vision for improved health and wellbeing. If you desire to make a positive change in one or more areas of personal health in 2025, join us. Includes four group sessions and up to four private one-on-one coaching session per participant.
January 29, *This Time Next Year: Vision, Values and Goals*. What do we want? Why do we want it?
April 29, *Making Progress: Challenges, Insights and New Habits*. What are we learning?
July 29, *What Needs Attention Now?: The Integrated Approach to Health*. Checking in with ourselves.
October 29, *Sustaining Our Behavior Changes: A Plan and Strategies for Support*. Standing on our strengths for forward movement.
Leader: Solita Denard, Health Integration 629, LLC, partners with clients as they create a vision and then take action to improve personal health
Cost: \$229 for the series of four sessions
Register: www.rcwms.org, contact: info@rcwms.org.

January 31–February 2, 2025, Friday–Sunday
SENSES AND SENSIBILITIES: Unique Ways to Engage Your Senses While Writing & Creating Art
Well of Mercy Retreat Center, Hamptonville, NC
Start your new year at this annual, “Wintry Mix” retreat for women. We'll slow down, pay attention and respond to prompts and projects versus reacting to conditioned “rules.” We'll use each of our five senses as inspiration and discover our sixth while creating art, writing, and via unique experiences such as: simultaneous sensing, a sound bath healing session, creating art while listening to music, writing poetry in unusual locations, and a soothing foot bath.
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer, artist, wanderer, and leader of retreats who lives in Durham, NC. She will be assisted by Laura Conte-Brazile
Cost: \$500, room (private bath), meals, & all materials
Register: by Jan. 19, artwanders.com/retreats/

February 25, 2025, Tuesday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm
EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK Symposium
Duke University Library, Durham, NC
Celebrate the opening of an exhibit on the work and legacy of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950 – 2009), poet, literary critic, artist, mentor, and teacher. She was a founder of the field of Queer Theory in the early 1990s. Sponsor: Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University Library, Durham, NC
Cost: Free
Info and registration: <https://duke.libcal.com/calendar/events/eks-opening>

(Continued next column.)

Calendar...

March 6–9, 2025

60th ANNIVERSARY: Crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama

Dozens of events will take place all weekend to commemorate "Bloody Sunday," March 7, 1965, when a group of about 525 African American demonstrators gathered in Selma to demand the right to vote and walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Met by state troopers and postmen on horseback, they refused to turn back and were brutally beaten. Two weeks later, MLK and 3,200 protesters marched from Selma to Montgomery, prompting Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act.

More: www.selmajubilee.com/

March 16–18, 2024, Sunday–Tuesday

RETREAT in honor of Duke Divinity Women's Center 50th Anniversary

Peace Hill @ Avila, Durham, NC (peacehillavila.org)

You are invited to a time of celebration, honoring the 50th anniversary of founding the Women's Center at Duke Divinity and the herstories embedded in that ministry. Several Duke Div. alums are preparing a time and a space for stories of our lives to be told and heard, for alums and students to meet, and for renewing ties with classmates and with the institution we share.

Cost: \$195 per person includes room, board, & program
More details available in January; contact a planner with ideas and questions: Nancy Rosebaugh (nrosebaugh@hotmail.com), Betty Wolfe (bettywolfe@gmail.com)

March 27, 2025, Thursday, times TBA

JILL RAITT LECTURE & CHAPEL SERVICE

Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC

Continue the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Duke Divinity School Women's Center with this worship service and lecture.

Speaker: Kaitlin Curtice, author of *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*.

Cost: Free & open to the public

May 14–18, 2025, Wednesday–Sunday

UU WOMENSPIRIT Spring Gathering

Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC

The Beginning is the End, the End is the Beginning

Register: www.uuwomenspirit.org

*June 19–21, 2025

KINDRED SPIRITS: A Convergence of African American Quilters

Durham Convention Center, Durham, NC

Theme: *Space and Time—Quilting Afrofuturism*

African American quilters will gather for a time of sisterhood, exploration, and fun during Juneteenth weekend for workshops with top quilting professionals and a pop-up quilt show on Friday evening, June 20. Registration information will be available soon.

More: www.rcwms.org, info@rcwms.org

*WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING

January 2–9, May 4–10 & 10–16, Sept. 19–26, 2025

Info: contact Jeanette at info@rcwms.org

Ongoing

SOLO WANDERINGS & SOCIAL WANDERINGS!

Creative Retreats (with day and overnight options)

The Stable, a retreat, Durham, NC

Come alone or bring friends and enjoy a self-guided art retreat. Ages 12 and up.

Leader: Claudia Fulshaw, artist & retreat leader.

Cost: \$115 solo/\$75 extra person; overnight is extra.

Contact: artwanders.com, claudia@artwanders.com

Carry On!...

First out of the box were people pointing fingers at white people, at white women, at Latino people, at Black males, at the economy, at the Harris campaign, or at voter apathy. Others blamed the current administration's inability to stop the mass murder and destruction in Gaza, for which they deserve plenty of blame. One commentator called it a perfect storm of many of those very things. But the theory that finally made the most sense to me, especially when trying to understand split tickets in North Carolina, I'll call the hand grenade theory.

Assume that voters know something about what goes on in their town, county, and state, and that they think about the effect of their votes in local elections. But the federal government feels far away. And if voters are unhappy with the price of milk and eggs, they might be willing to throw a grenade at the whole federal mess and vote for a change.

Whether that theory is right or not, it gives me something to ponder for the time being. It will be years before research offers us more nuanced theories about what happened. And if we still have a democracy, we will all learn something from what I choose to call a debacle.

Meanwhile, the real question is, *What do we do now?*

After ranting, complaining, and sleeping a lot, I noticed that some of the gatherings, podcasts, video conferences, and articles started to offer options that made sense to me. The message was: stick together, take care of yourself and those around you, organize, and resist. And then one group offered useful guidelines about how to resist.

I recommend you check out Indivisible.org.

Here's what the founders of Indivisible did when *that guy* was elected the first time. They were, at the time, young staffers on Capitol Hill who had watched conservatives block legislation during Obama's presidency, stopping it in its tracks even when Obama had a more friendly Congress. They had watched from close range and taken notes. So they decided to write a guide on how to resist regressive legislation using the very tactics they had observed. They called it the *Indivisible Guide* and they invited citizens around the country to form small groups and use the guide. Thousands of people responded.

I attended an Indivisible meeting in a friend's neighborhood shortly after the inauguration of *that guy*. The house was packed. Several ideas grew out of that meeting and any number of people offered their skills to organize, research, and communicate. One idea that turned out to have sticking power was to rally on Tuesdays in Raleigh at Senator Thom Tillis' office and protest whatever the issue was at the moment. We called it Tuesdays with Tillis. That went on for a couple of years until the COVID pandemic hit and the group moved online. Now, 407 weeks later, the group is called Democracy Out Loud and is still meeting. Karen Ziegler became and has continued to be the organizer, with help from lots of other folks. Sometimes there is a speaker, sometimes it is a conversation among those present, but it always provides useful ideas and information. I attend



Queer Div.

RCWMS is seeking applicants for our next Queer Divinity Students Thriving in the South cohort, which will run from January through April 2025. This four-month, virtual, peer-supported cohort will meet eight times, will include eight participants, and will be led by an experienced facilitator.

We invite queer women, femmes, and nonbinary folks who are in divinity school, seminary, or other institutions/processes of religious leadership education to apply for a virtual cohort. We welcome queer women and femmes (cis and trans) and nonbinary applicants from all religious and spiritual traditions, and we are committed to gathering a racially and spiritually diverse cohort.

We recognize that the terms “queer,” “woman,” “nonbinary,” and “divinity student” are all imperfect. We will use these terms liberally and inclusively within the selection process, and we invite you to apply for the cohort even if these terms are not a perfect fit.

We are happy to welcome Rev. Dr. Shonda Jones as the facilitator for the 2025 cohort and Chloe Griffin as the program manager.

The Rev. Dr. Shonda Jones is the executive director of academic programs at the School of Professional Studies, Wake Forest University in Charlotte, NC and the Principal Investigator for The Faith COMPASS Center at Wake Forest University School of Divinity. Before joining Wake Forest, Dr. Jones served as Associate Dean at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology (Atlanta, GA) and Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology (Dallas, TX).

Chloe Griffin (she/they) is from Greensboro, North Carolina. She is a PhD student in the Religious Studies department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They also hold a BA in Philosophy and a History minor from UNC-CH and a Master of Divinity from Wake Forest University School of Divinity with a concentration in Interfaith Literacy and Leadership.

Application deadline: Friday, December 13, at 9:00 pm Eastern Time. Applicants will be notified of decisions in mid-December.

Learn more: rcwms.org/2024/seeking-applicants-for-queer-divinity-students-thriving-in-the-south/

Carry On!...

irregularly, but no one seems to mind. There are no dues, it's not even an organization; it's just a group of citizens in and around the Triangle who care about justice, equality, the environment.

These next few months and years are going to be challenging. It has been a long time since the country was controlled by such frightening people in the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. But giving up on our values is not an option.

So my conclusion after the election is that we need to stick together. Don't get isolated. Take care of yourself. When you get overwhelmed stop reading the news. Take a break, then do what you can. The next elections aren't that far away. The new administration may enact such dreadful policies that we will have a chance to improve the makeup of the Congress in 2026.

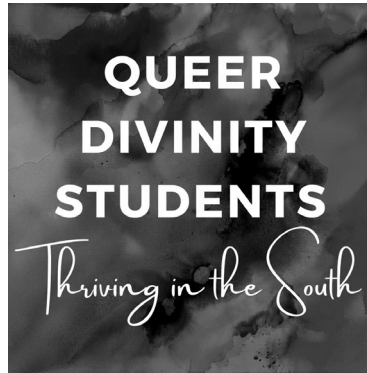


RCWMS is a forty-seven-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious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

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To contribute, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org. We are especially grateful for support from E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Fnd., Emerald Isle Realty, Inavale Fnd., the Paul Green Fnd., and the Triangle Community Fnd.

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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. Please send a check to our office at: RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to www.rcwms.org.

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