

Connections

Claiming a place Resource center gives women a voice in religion

Clergywomen say religious institutions have excluded them for centuries. By providing support, information and workshops, the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is working to change that

By KATE FOSTER

Durham

At first glance, the resource center on the sixth floor of West Main Street in one of downtown Durham's oldest buildings looks like any other office.

But talking with anyone who has

RELIGION

participated in its programs or workshops quickly reveals its importance in the community.

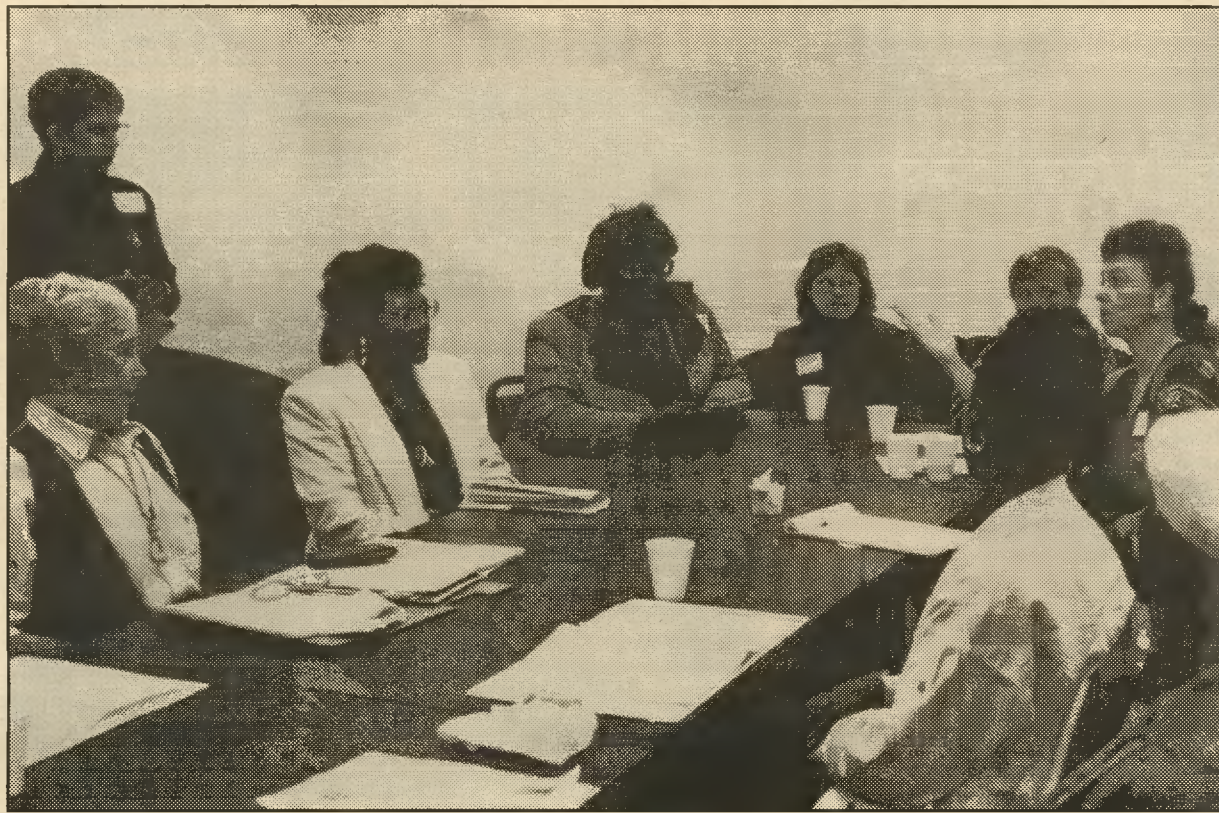
This place is much more than an office. The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South has been providing support and informational programming for women in North Carolina and the southeast for nearly 18 years.

It was formed in 1977 by three women at the Divinity School at Duke University who wanted to establish a network of support for women involved in religion. Jeannette Stokes, a founding member of the Resource Center and its current executive director, was a member of the second class at the 68-year-old Divinity School to accept women.

"There was nobody out there that was interested in women and the ministry," says Stokes who graduated in 1977. "There was nobody who was going to look after or connect clergywomen."

A brochure about the resource

Look for VOICE, page 5



Setting priorities

Agenda promotes women's issues

N.C. Equity has mobilized women in the state to make their voices heard by producing a formal agenda of women's issues and coordinating a response to important legislation.

By EALENA CALLENDER

Health care, adolescent pregnancy prevention, violence against women and access to child care are the leading concerns of women throughout North Carolina, according to N.C. Equity.

Through its Women's Agenda program, the Raleigh-based nonprofit sponsored assemblies in various Tar Heel locales to encourage women to make their voices heard in the state legislature.

About 1,800 women attended last year's assemblies, which were held September through November and were designed to formulate an agenda of women's issues.

"There are very few occasions

ADVOCACY

where citizens are invited to think seriously together about the problems in their community and they love it," says Ann Mackie, director of the Women's Agenda program.

At each assembly, women discussed a wide range of social and economic issues. After meeting in small groups, they were asked to rank those issues in order of importance (see box above).

Although health access and women's health issues were presented as separate issues, many women at the assemblies suggested that both issues are equally significant.

The assemblies found that women's health-care concerns range from drug and alcohol abuse to reproductive rights.

One of the surprises this year, says Mackie, was the rise of issues concerning aging in the list of priorities. While it was the fifth most important issue on this year's agen-

da, in the past it was ranked only 14th or 15th.

"Health-care reform has raised the whole issue of long-term care in people's minds," Mackie says.

Results from the assemblies will be compiled in a report, N.C. Equity 1995-96 Women's Agenda, which will be presented to state lawmakers when they convene in Raleigh this month for their long session. The report will contain information on each of the top issues, along with recommendations for public policy changes.

Legislators will be invited to a statewide assembly planned for Feb. 4 in Raleigh, where the report will be presented. About 300 women are expected to take part in advocacy training workshops and discussions of strategies for top-priority issues.

While lawmakers are in session, N.C. Equity will continue to encourage women to act as advocates for pertinent issues.

About 38 women's networks have been formed throughout the state to coordinate the "advocacy response."

These groups will organize workshops on advocacy and keep each other abreast of legislative activities.

"We are trying to get the network to be something that is a group of women leaders who meet occasionally in between these events to strengthen each other's advocacy leadership in their communities in whatever they are doing," Mackie says.

N.C. Equity also will provide weekly updates on legislation concerning issues on the women's agenda through its toll-free Equity Alert Line, (800) 451-8065, ext. 29.

"The obvious reason we are doing this is the building of an agenda and working on it," Mackie says. "Just as important is the development of a skilled leadership force of women in the state who can act on all manner of issues beyond their concerns as women."

Copies of the N.C. Equity report are \$3 each, plus postage and handling. To obtain a copy, call (800) 451-8065, ext. 28.

TOP ISSUES ON WOMEN'S AGENDA:

- Health care
- Adolescent pregnancy prevention
- Violence against women
- Access to child care
- Aging
- Economic development
- Literacy

Source: N.C. Equity

At a special meeting in Edenton, women from Chowan, Perquimans, Washington and Gates counties met in small groups to formulate an agenda of women's issues to send to the state legislature.

Photo by Anne Mackie

Philanthropy Journal of North Carolina

A PUBLICATION OF
The News and Observer
Foundation
215 S. McDowell St.
Raleigh, NC 27601
(919) 829-8988

VOL. 2 No. 5

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES

1 year (12 issues)	\$57
2 years (24 issues)	\$104
3 years (36 issues)	\$143

Multiple-copy discounts available.
Call (919) 829-4763 for rates.

FOR SUBSCRIPTION
INFORMATION,
CALL (919) 829-4763
OR
(919) 829-8991.

A ripple effect

Smart Start helps break down racial barriers

Among the aims of the state's Smart Start program for early childhood development is bringing communities together around common problems. Participants say a related effect of Smart Start is improved race relations.

By BARBARA SOLOW

The legislation that created North Carolina's Smart Start program for early childhood development makes no mention of race relations.

But by bringing people together to improve services for young children, the initiative has helped build bridges across racial lines, participants say.

"Heretofore, black folks did their

thing and white folks did their thing and never the twain shall meet," says Democratic State Rep. Howard Hunter of Murfreesboro, a Smart Start supporter. "Now, you have groups working together on behalf of all children."

Participants say it is too early to tell whether Smart Start programs actually will help reduce racism and discrimination. But the process of creating local Smart Start projects has opened new avenues for discussion of those issues.

"What we've been hearing in the whole race relations area often comes down to a lack of communication," says Tom Lambeth, executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and a member of the board of directors of the

It is a painstaking process to bring all the interests to the table. But when we do that, we find that there is so much more that we have in common than those unique identifiers that split us.

CHARLES CHAPMAN
chairman Durham Partnership for Children

North Carolina Partnership for Children, which coordinates Smart Start. "It seems to me that the Smart Start approach to local groups, which requires a considerable amount of community involvement, creates new opportunities for communication."

By focusing on the needs of poor children, the initiative also forces communities to address the underlying links between race and poverty.

"Anything that involves education and children and issues of poverty in North Carolina, has to talk about race," Lambeth says.

Smart Start was launched in 1993, with 12 state-funded pilot programs aimed at ensuring that children under the age of five come to school ready to learn.

In September, 14 new public/private partnerships were selected for funding from a pool of 74 community groups. The partnerships will split \$14.8 million from the General Assembly to fund services ranging from day care to health care to transportation.

The legislation that created Smart Start requires that nonprofit partnership boards be representative of communities, including business leaders, family members, childcare

Look for SMART, page 9