

# WOMEN'S THEOLOGICAL CENTER

November 1985

An Occasional Newsletter

Vol. 3 No. 4

Dear Friends,

As this newsletter goes to press in early November, we are well into our 1985-86 year, having begun our "Women's Stories/ Women's Lives: A Cross-Cultural Exploration" series, as well as our Study/Action program for the year. We have also just completed work on the "Domestic Violence, Theology and the Church" conference held in late October, on which two Study/Action participants report in this issue. We hope that our year continues on such a successful, high-energy note, and that you might be able to join us at either the lecture series presentation in November or in January.

## NEW STUDENTS - WELCOME!

We welcome sixteen new Study/Action Participants for the 1985-86 year; meet Margaret, Jannie and Pat:

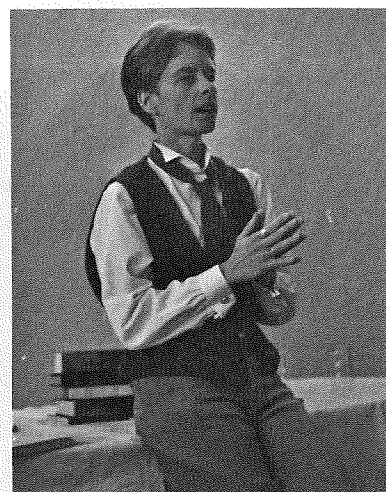
*Margaret Haining Cowles* comes to Boston from St. Paul, Minnesota, where she had been practicing law. Due to being unable to locate work locally as a lawyer since her arrival in Boston in 1983, she has had the opportunity to distance herself from her profession and to rethink her career choice. She comes to the WTC with an interest in reflecting further on the questions she has been raising for herself regarding vocation and mission in her life, and feels she has chosen the right place for this reflection at the WTC!

*Jannie Crossler*, deeply rooted in the soil, trees and mountains of Oregon, has spent the last four years of her life in South Korea. Her name in Korean is "Jae Hee", meaning "to be" and "woman". She is a woman committed to the struggle of women for self-respect and of all people for justice, and comes to the WTC loving community yet discovering solitude, and learning to enjoy her body and mind. She is struggling to see how all these pieces of her life can connect.

*Pat Boyle* arrives at the WTC with many open questions and an intense desire to learn with other women. She is a 37-year-old Roman Catholic Sister of Mercy and has worked as teacher, community organizer, social minister, and political activist in communities as diverse as New York City; Miami, Florida; and rural Pennsylvania. She works from a faith commitment and desire to live justly, and feels that underlying her experiences in her life flows a steady, often turbulent, stream of deep transformation. She feels that her journeying is converging as she treats herself to a year of study and reflection at the WTC.



*Margaret Haining Cowles*



Rev. Marie Fortune  
at Domestic Violence  
Conference

As this newsletter goes to press, our conference on "Domestic Violence, Theology and the Church" held on the weekend of 25-26 October has just been completed. Co-sponsors for this event were the WTC, the Anna Howard Shaw Center at the Boston University School of Theology, and the Office of Women's Programs at Harvard Divinity School. Judy Harris and Kathy Pendergast, current WTC Study/Action Participants, report on this event.

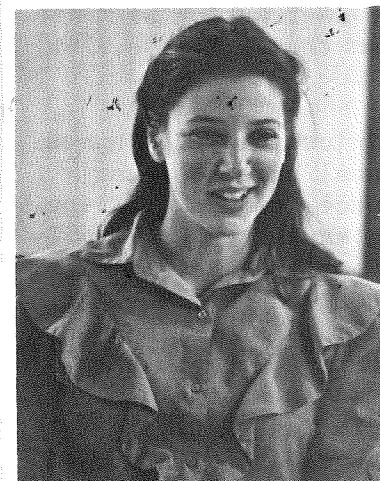
"The most dangerous place for a woman to live is in an intimate relationship; the most dangerous place for a child to grow up is in a family."

-Rev. Marie Fortune  
25 October 1985

Early in her presentation, the Rev. Marie Fortune made the above statement, and as she continued her address, citing facts, experiences and traditions, left no room for anyone in the audience to deny the painful reality it depicts. A reality that is epidemic in proportion and that crosses over all social, racial, economic and religious boundaries. A reality that can go in any direction in a family, but usually involves the most vulnerable members--women, children and the elderly. A reality that is confirmed by statistics such as one out of two women will be battered at some time in her life...that one out of seven women will experience marital rape (which is still legal in some states)...that one out of three female children and one out of seven male children will be sexually abused before the age of eighteen by a family member or trusted family friend. Rev. Fortune noted that these statistics do not vary substantially for Christians and, later in her talk, questioned why the majority of women who seek shelter or counsel for childhood experiences are brought up in "Christian" households.

The name given to this reality is FAMILY VIOLENCE, and naming it for what it is--violence within the family--is crucial to addressing it. Rev. Fortune used the following categories to define family violence: 1) Physical violence which can range from a shove to death, and everything in between; 2) Sexual abuse, which includes marital rape and incest; 3) Psychological abuse, which includes such things as humiliation, degradation, and isolation; and 4) Destruction of property and pets which she explained is not "the random destruction of the house; it is destruction directed at that which belongs to the person being victimized." Like psychological abuse, it always carries the threat of physical violence.

Convincingly, she explained some of the reasons that family violence occurs. First, we live in a climate of tolerance where it is ignored, minimized, and/or denied...where individuals, churches, institutions and society in general fail to name, speak, hear or own this crime. Citing deeply-rooted western legal and religious traditions, the audience gained deeper understanding, however enraged, of how this climate has been created. One example of this was the familiar "rule of thumb" saying, which Rev. Fortune explained originated in the English common law, making it legal for a husband to beat his wife with a stick no bigger than his thumb. Equally rooted was a 15th century book entitled "Rules of Marriage" which was



Jannie Crossler



Pat Boyle (center), with  
Peggy Franzen (l) and  
Susan Davies (r) at WTC  
Fall Retreat

GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS!

We are delighted to report good news on our funding efforts. We have received a \$3,000 "matching" grant from the Marianist Brothers Sharing Fund and a \$1,000 grant for the establishment of an on-going Memorial/Recognition Fund; in addition, we have had a fund-raising party through which we not only raised over \$700, but also met many new people who are interested in our work.

Through the matching grant from the Marianist Brothers, we have the opportunity of doubling the value of any contributions we receive toward the "match" up to \$3,000. This means that every dollar you send us is worth \$2.00 if you indicate that you are contributing to the matching grant. So we eagerly solicit your support. Please return a contribution TODAY along with the card attached to the enclosed envelope.

You may want to make your matching gift in special recognition or memory of someone important in your life. The gift we have received to establish the Memorial/Recognition Fund was given in recognition of and appreciation for the work of Elizabeth Jackson, Ted Ninesteel, Valerie Russell and other women associated with the National Student YWCA's work on the YW's One Imperative, "To eliminate racism wherever it exists by any means necessary." We invite you to make memorial/recognition contributions to the Fund. We will publish the names of those you wish to remember/recognize and, if your contribution is in recognition of a living person, will notify them of the contribution.

Another way you can contribute to the "matching" grant is through gifts at the holiday season. As in the past, we will send a card to the person(s) to whom you give the gift of participation in the support of the WTC's work.

Special appreciation is in order for Barbara and Fred Nielsen-Whitcomb who sponsored an elegant fund-raising party for us in early October. Featuring superb food and marvelous jazz piano and vibraphones, the party afforded an opportunity for WTC friends to visit with each other and to introduce new people to our work. We are grateful for this opportunity and for the new friends and new support it made possible.

We are grateful for your support in these beginning years. Without the financial and psychic support we have received from you, our readers, we would not have survived this long, and we cannot move into the future with strength and confidence without your continued support.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*\*It has come to our attention that due to a misunderstanding of current postal regulations, some of you who have made contributions to the WTC over the past years might not have received a card from us thanking you for your gift. If this is the case, we sincerely apologize. Our misunderstanding has now been clarified and corrected, and we herein are offering our appreciation for your gifts, should you not have heard from us before!



"Domestic  
end of  
for this  
the Boston  
men's  
and Kathy  
report on

"Sojourns with Black  
Women," the WTC Resource  
Center's program series  
of the 1984-85 year will  
be aired on Boston Cable  
TV (Channel 3) at the  
following times:

Audre Lorde: Nov. 20,  
8:00 pm; Dec. 9, 6:00  
pm.

Barbara Smith: Nov. 27,  
8:00 pm; Dec. 16, 6:00  
pm.

Karen Fields: Dec. 4,  
8:00 pm; Dec. 23, 6:00  
pm.

Joan Martin: Dec. 11,  
8:00 pm; Dec. 30, 6:00  
pm.

Katie Cannon, Dec. 18,  
8:00 pm; Jan. 6, 6:00  
pm.

Many thanks go to Idola  
Williams and to Imani-  
Sheila Newsome, who have  
spent many hours in the  
editing of these tapes  
for television and in the  
overall coordination of  
this project.

ade the  
citing  
anyone in  
A reality  
all  
A reality  
y involves  
e elderly.  
e out of  
e...that one  
ch is still  
e children  
abused  
asted family  
e not vary  
e questioned  
el for  
households.

and naming  
acial to  
gories to  
can range  
Sexual  
psychological  
gradation.  
ts which  
house; it  
e person  
ays carries

family  
erance  
e individ-  
fail to  
rooted  
gained  
limate has  
"rule of  
ed in the  
beat his  
rooted was  
ch was

given to clergy to help them counsel married couples. It instructed husbands to "scold your wife sharply, bull and terrify her. If this doesn't work, pick up a stick and beat her soundly for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body. And readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul so that the beating will renoun to your merit and her good." These examples, scripture interpreted to oppress, and the church's belief that any marriage is better than none, have helped make it "sacred" for some clergy to send battered women and incest victims back into the family with instructions to be submissive and "pray for deliverance."

In order to end this nightmare, Rev. Fortune suggested that 1) We must break the silence and call this crime the unacceptable and intolerable crime that it is, and for us in the religious community, name it as a sin before God; 2) Name it when we see it; and 3) Through our ministry, turn "private pain into a public issue." Furthermore, she said, we must ask the question "why?" and then struggle with the answers that "take us to the foundation of our society and institutions; which take us to our understanding of theology and scripture." Only then will it be possible for a new "norm" in our society to be created. Stressing the power of the religious community, she called for seminaries to provide family violence education and the opportunity for field site work at the places where it is addressed. The effectiveness of this was dramatically illustrated when she shared a story of a minister who announced to his congregation that he was attending four workshops on family violence. Within a couple of weeks three members of his congregation came and told him of incest and battering. Rev. Fortune explained that these were not new cases, but rather situations of long duration...the difference came when he publicly named the problem, or "hung out a sign" that he knew something about it.

In calling for a new "norm" Rev. Fortune also spoke of getting the true meaning out of scripture that depicts abuse of women and children...of Jesus, who regarded women as fully worthy and lifted up children as those to whom the kingdom belonged...of one of the origins of the word "victim" as being one who is sacrificed to a deity, and to this she questioned, "What God could possibly be served by the sacrifice of so many?"...of our silence and denial, and how it has confirmed the truth that the sins of the fathers will be passed to the sons...and finally, of theological tradition that seems to speak of justice on a large scale as opposed to justice on an individual scale.

In closing, Rev. Fortune states that restoration is possible only when justice is made. Justice occurs, she offered, when we break the silence, when we stand by the victims and advocate with them, when we confront the offenders and call for their repentance, when we protect the victim from further abuse, and when violence to women of color, lesbians and gays is considered equally as wrong and victims are equally supported. Only then can we even begin to create a climate possible for healing and reconciliation. "For us to say tonight that the way things are is not the way they have to be is nothing but a statement of faith, and faith alone."...It is a faith that many of us bring



(l-r) Diane Faretra,  
Fernando Maderos, Susan  
Harlow, Victoria Nunez  
and Donna Bivens, Panel  
Moderator, at Domestic  
Violence Conference

Thinking about partici-  
pating in the WTC Study/  
Action Program? Now is  
the time to check it  
out. Visit us for the  
weekend, meet current  
students and faculty  
and learn more about who  
we are and how we work  
together. Details on  
enclosed flyer.

here tonight, a faith that challenges and confronts institutions and a faith that "we give thanks and pray that God's spirit will bless our efforts together."

Following Rev. Fortune, Lucia Guzman, a Mexican-American theological education student addressed the audience. Speaking for people of color, she explained that the things of which Rev. Fortune spoke never meant "family violence," but were rather "just the way things were." She talked of the centuries of violence inflicted on her people, of the destruction of self-esteem starting from the beginning when they are told, "We are not the people of this land."

For those who have suffered a lifetime of injustices, she named herself a victim and acknowledged her personal bias as being skewed towards helping the victim experience justice. Citing self-esteem as crucial for restoration, she explained how family violence takes a person's self-esteem from her and that it cannot be given back. Victims might feel better and gain insight, but the greatest crime of sexual assault "leaves a scar so deep that it cannot be seen." Referring to a South African bishop who compared people's experience of apartheid as a people's suffering a "long Good Friday," so too do victims of family violence suffer a long Good Friday. Like those in South Africa they believe Easter is coming; they just don't know when.

In closing, Lucia called for women of color to find a new theology of liberation that would allow us to create new norms. A theology that brings God down to the people...a theology that does not allow victims to feel that evil done to them is a precious gift that they must bear...and finally, a theology that says no one deserves to be treated this way.

On Saturday, a panel consisting of four people addressed the topic of "Resources the Church Could Offer to Prevent Family Violence." Panel members included Victoria Nuñez, Community Education and Volunteer Specialist at Casa Myrna Vazquez; Diane Faretra, a Volunteer at Harbor Me; Susan Harlow, Minister of Education at the First Church, Congregational, in Cambridge; and Fernando Maderos, Staff Person at Emerge. Following the panel discussion, workshops were held throughout the rest of the day on the issues of "Appropriate and Inappropriate Pastoral Responses," led by Rev. Fortune, and on "Successful and Unsuccessful Interventions," led by Dr. Susan Cayotte of the North Shore Community Health Center. A film, "Suzanne, Suzanne" was also shown, with discussion of the film being led by Donna Bivens, Co-Director of the Women's Theological Center.

As the day closed, participants joined together to name and chart those empowering and hindering forces that effect us in our attempts to confront domestic violence. By visually charting the overwhelming impact of traditions which serve as hindrances, as well as other obstacles, we avoided denying the difficulty of the task ahead. We then met within small groups to discuss how we as individuals working with our own resources can develop strategies for breaking the silence. Without denying or minimizing the magnitude of the struggle, we were able to leave the conference having a sense of our individual sources of power that we can use to continue our efforts to eradicate domestic violence.





Jannie Crossler



Pat Boyle (center), with Peggy Franzen (l) and Susan Davies (r) at WTC Fall Retreat

GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS!

We are delighted to report good news on our funding efforts. We have received a \$3,000 "matching" grant from the Marianist Brothers Sharing Fund and a \$1,000 grant for the establishment of an on-going Memorial/Recognition Fund; in addition, we have had a fund-raising party through which we not only raised over \$700, but also met many new people who are interested in our work.

Through the matching grant from the Marianist Brothers, we have the opportunity of doubling the value of any contributions we receive toward the "match" up to \$3,000. This means that every dollar you send us is worth \$2.00 if you indicate that you are contributing to the matching grant. So we eagerly solicit your support. Please return a contribution TODAY along with the card attached to the enclosed envelope.

You may want to make your matching gift in special recognition or memory of someone important in your life. The gift we have received to establish the Memorial/Recognition Fund was given in recognition of and appreciation for the work of Elizabeth Jackson, Ted Ninesteel, Valerie Russell and other women associated with the National Student YWCA's work on the YW's One Imperative, "To eliminate racism wherever it exists by any means necessary." We invite you to make memorial/recognition contributions to the Fund. We will publish the names of those you wish to remember/recognize and, if your contribution is in recognition of a living person, will notify them of the contribution.

Another way you can contribute to the "matching" grant is through gifts at the holiday season. As in the past, we will send a card to the person(s) to whom you give the gift of participation in the support of the WTC's work.

Special appreciation is in order for Barbara and Fred Nielsen-Whitcomb who sponsored an elegant fund-raising party for us in early October. Featuring superb food and marvelous jazz piano and vibraphones, the party afforded an opportunity for WTC friends to visit with each other and to introduce new people to our work. We are grateful for this opportunity and for the new friends and new support it made possible.

We are grateful for your support in these beginning years. Without the financial and psychic support we have received from you, our readers, we would not have survived this long, and we cannot move into the future with strength and confidence without your continued support.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*\*It has come to our attention that due to a misunderstanding of current postal regulations, some of you who have made contributions to the WTC over the past years might not have received a card from us thanking you for your gift. If this is the case, we sincerely apologize. Our misunderstanding has now been clarified and corrected, and we herein are offering our appreciation for your gifts, should you not have heard from us before!

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
BOSTON, MA  
PERMIT NO. 58625



Suzanne Lee (seated) and Gloria Fox (standing) at "Women's Stories/Women's Lives" Presentation in September

Margaret Haining Cowles, another 1985-86 Study/Action Participant, reports on the first program of our "Women's Stories/Women's Lives" series, "Women Building Community."

The 1985-86 WTC Resource Center series, "Women's Stories/Women's Lives: A Cross-Cultural Exploration," opened on Friday, September 20, with a panel of speakers on the theme of "Women Building Community." Suzanne Lee, Bilingual Coordinator, Boston School Department, spoke of her community organizing efforts in Chinatown. She was followed by Carole Rossi, Coordinator, East Boston Ecumenical Community Council, who discussed her work with the East Boston Community. Gloria Fox, State Representative from District 7, Roxbury, closed the evening with an account of her career in Massachusetts politics.

Each of the women framed her current community-building work in the context of her own personal beginnings. Suzanne Lee shared some realities about growing up as a Chinese-American and how her own experiences shaped her commitment to the Chinese-American community at large. Carole Rossi spoke of her childhood years with her Italian-American family in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in Camden, New Jersey, and how the diversity of sounds and smells seemed familiar when she first encountered East Boston. Gloria Fox related memories of growing up poor and Black in Boston and of her first organizing attempts on behalf of the housing project where she raised her children.

A fourth speaker, Carmen Pola, Senior Advisor in Human Needs, Mayor Flynn's Office, was scheduled to represent the viewpoint of Hispanic women but was unable to attend.

The Resource Center series will continued with a program entitled "Roots Uprooted: Dealing with Historical Dislocation" at Boston University on Friday, November 15, followed by a workshop on Saturday, November 16. Please call the WTC at 277-1330 if you would like more information on this series.

Return Postage Guaranteed

WOMEN'S THEOLOGICAL CENTER  
400 THE FENWAY  
BOSTON, MA 02115



Women's Theological Center 400 The Fenway Boston MA 02115