Centers And Programs. Office Of Women's Affairs/Center For Women And Religion

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Centers And Programs. Office Of Women's Affairs/Center For Women And Religion

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Abstract: The Center was founded in 1970 as the Office of Women's Affairs by women who recognized “that seminary women at the GTU schools needed a channel, an advocate, an office through which to express their needs and concerns.” The name was changed in about 1977 to Center for Women and Religion. The Center worked toward the goal of ending sexism and promoting justice in and through religion focusing on research, the status of women in religious structures, and community building for women. Activities included offering GTU courses, sponsorship of conferences, programs, and groups, and the publication of anthologies, bibliographies, a journal, and newsletters.

Language of Material: English

Access

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

The collection came to Archives from the Center in two portions, the first in 1992 and the second in 2004.

Biography/Administrative History

The Center for Women and Religion was the earliest established center for women in theological education. It was founded in 1970 as the Office of Women's Affairs by Bay Area women in religion, including some GTU women, who recognized “that seminary women at the GTU schools needed a channel, an advocate, an office through which to express their needs and concerns.” (CWR Newsletter, Summer 1978, pg. 10) It operated originally out of Unitas, the campus ministry program at the University of California, Berkeley. Soon, OWA became affiliated with the GTU, though the process, complicated by discussions about and differing expectations of funding, sponsorship, and support, was not smooth or simple. In 1977, the name was changed to the Center for Women and Religion. For a short period, both names were used for various events and functions. After affiliation with GTU, OWA/CWR had an office at the 2465 LeConte Building (then the administration building for the GTU), expanding later to an office in the GTU Annex at 2452 Virginia and the CWR House at 1730 Scenic. OWA/CWR conceived that the foci of its work would be in the areas of research, the status of women in religious structures, and community building for women students, faculty, staff, and spouses moving to the goal of ending sexism and promoting justice in and through religion. It worked to accomplish these goals through the distribution of resources, offering GTU courses, and through various sponsored conferences, programs, events, and groups. Early publications include Women and the Word: Toward a Whole Theology an anthology of women's writings; Women in a Strange Land: Search for a New Image, a collection of writings about women's experiences of isolation during the period of early feminist theological scholarship; and Woman: A Theological Perspective, 1974, a bibliography on women and religion compiled by Clare Fischer and Rochelle Gatlin, and an updated Breaking Through: A Bibliography of Women and Religion, 1980. CWR published a newsletter starting in 1975. While continuing the Newsletter, the Center also began publishing the Journal of Women and Religion in 1981, ceasing publication with Vol. 19-20 in 2002. The Feminist Curriculum Project functioned 1983-2002. Grants generated income for a Curriculum Coordinator who coordinated CWR sponsored courses in the Graduate Theological Union curriculum, usually one each semester as well as during January Inter-term and in the summer school. Instructors were
CWR staff, GTU graduate students, or member school faculty members. Courses were taught on a feminist model. The repeated courses were usually Feminist Theology, Feminist Issues, or Feminist Ethics. Individual or one-time courses on various issues were offered over the years. By 1985, CWR was able to express its purpose thus: the Center is “an international network of members committed to mutual support, education, and action. It is an ecumenical community whose purpose is: (1) to transform theological education through curriculum, faculty development, and pedagogical transformation pursuant to a feminist perspective, and through research and resource development; (2) to affirm and support equal and just participation of women within religious institutions; (3) to affirm and support ministry by CWR and by women beyond the traditional structures of church and theological education; and (4) to develop seminary and extra-seminary funding sources.” (“Proposal to Attend the UN Decade for Women in Nairobi, Kenya, July 1985”) The leadership of the Center evolved over the years. This was due to changing concepts of how functions and staffing were understood and a model of shared work practiced. The leadership functions and persons were: 1970-71 – Joann Nash Eakin, Board Chairwoman; Muriel J. Freer, Administrator; and Floris Mikkelsen, Coordinator. 1972 – The staff was divided into four non-hierarchical functions: Muriel Freer, Seminaries; Lynne Fitch, Denominations; Karen Bloomquist, Coordinator/funding; and Beth Kissling, Office Administrator. 1973 – There were three non-hierarchical positions: Rose Horman Arthur, Office Coordinator; Elizabeth Hambrick-Stowe and Kathleen Brewer, Women’s Center Coordinators. 1974-76 – Full time Coordinator, Sally Dries and an expanding staff working non-hierarchically. 1977 - Coordinators Peggy Cleveland, Madelyn Stelmac, and Barbara Waugh. 1978-83 – Co-Directors Barbara Waugh and Mary Cross. 1980 – Sandra Park, Assistant Director. 1984-85 – Mary Cross, Director and Sandra Park, Associate Director. 1986-89 – Co-Directors Mary Cross, Margaret McManus, Sandra Yarlott. 1989-93 – Director, Pamela Cooper-White. 1994-96, Marta Vides, Interim Director. 1996 – Co-interim Directors, Amy Teischman and Sheri Hostetler. 1997-2004 – Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Director. CWR continued its mission and program sponsoring conferences, programs, events, and groups into the beginning of the 21st Century. In 2000, the mission was stated as promoting “diverse women’s voices in cutting edge theology education for spiritual growth and social change.” Due to a lack in funding, the Center for Women and Religion ceased operation in early 2004. "Our context as a Center for Women and Religion in the midst of nine traditional theological institutions gives us a unique opportunity to see the effects of women’s exclusion from theological culture. We see how the exclusion of women from leadership and theological education results in the elimination of women as shapers of official theological culture . . . Because feminist theology does not control the definition of the tradition it has not had any power to determine what will be read and remembered by the next generation of theology students. So, we continue to lose our own history and we have to begin again and again as though our questions had never been asked or answered before.” – Sandra Yarlott, CWR Director, 1986

Scope and Content of Collection

Indexing Terms
Feminism -- Religious aspects -- History -- Sources
Women -- Clergy -- History -- Sources
Women -- San Francisco Bay area -- History -- Sources
Women and religion -- History -- Sources
Women in church work -- History -- Sources
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