

SOUTHEASTERN NEWS

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WORKSHOP ADDRESSES WOMEN IN MINISTRY

By Robyn Hood Black

Wake Forest, N.C. - Participants in a recent workshop on women in ministry were urged to stick with the Southern Baptist Convention even though the role of women is a current subject of controversy in the denomination.

Citing "the role of women in the church" as a "focal point of tension" in the SBC, Anne Neil, chair of the Women's Resource Center at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, "we're encouraging women to stay with their call and really stay within the Convention."

The workshop, sponsored by the Women's Resource Center and Southeastern Seminary, picked up where a similar convocation on women last spring left off.

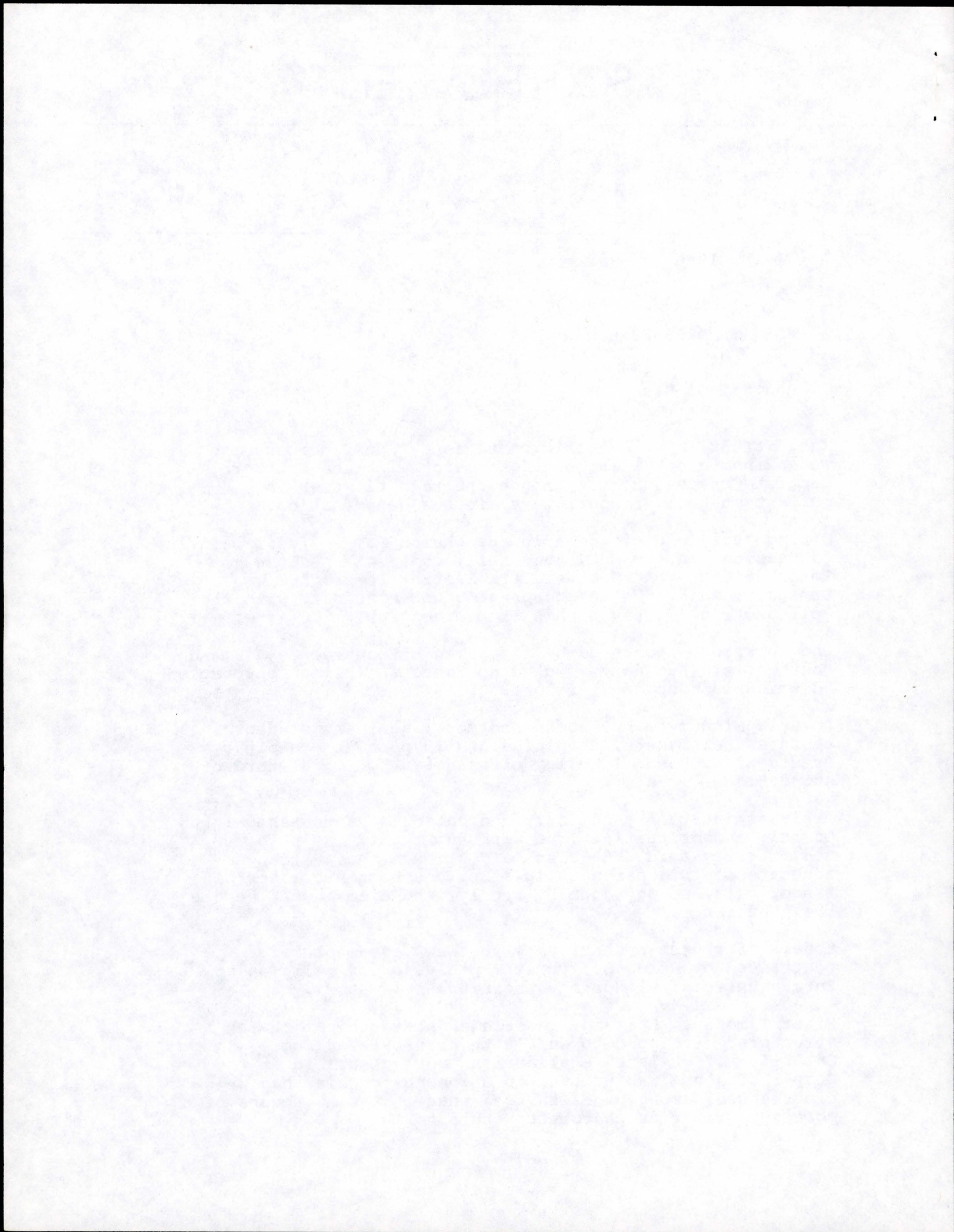
In welcoming over 100 women and men - seminary students, pastors, homemakers, chaplains and laypersons - Seminary President W. Randall Lolley offered his "official word of support."

"This seminary is a seminary dedicated to Partnership in the Gospel: a Continuation (the workshop theme), so help us God," Lolley said. He also paid tribute to "a strong advocate of this partnership," Southeastern Professor of Historical Theology John E. Steely, who died a week before the conference.

Models of church authority in the New Testament were contrasted by Helen Lee Turner, professor of religion at Furman University, during a morning Bible study.

First Timothy, she said, reveals a "hierarchical church structure" developed to deal with "radical Pauline Christians," while an egalitarian model described in the Gospel of John "was written to a community which had experienced, among other things, what it saw as abuses of a more authoritarian church structure."

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Though she stated her preference for the Johannine model, Turner acknowledged the usefulness of both structures for particular circumstances.

In light of these models today, she stressed the role of diversity within the SBC.

While admitting that this diversity causes problems, particularly in areas of Biblical interpretation, Turner argued that the authority problem in the SBC does not revolve around the authority of the Bible.

"The issue is not that Baptists fail to view the Bible as authoritative," she said. "... The real issue in this case involves our varying views of ecclesiastical authority..."

"Why? Because diversity is already at work within the New Testament itself."

The hierarchical and egalitarian positions should be used "to conterbalance and critique each other," she said, but she stressed that "women ought not be the victims even in a community with a hierarchical view of church authority."

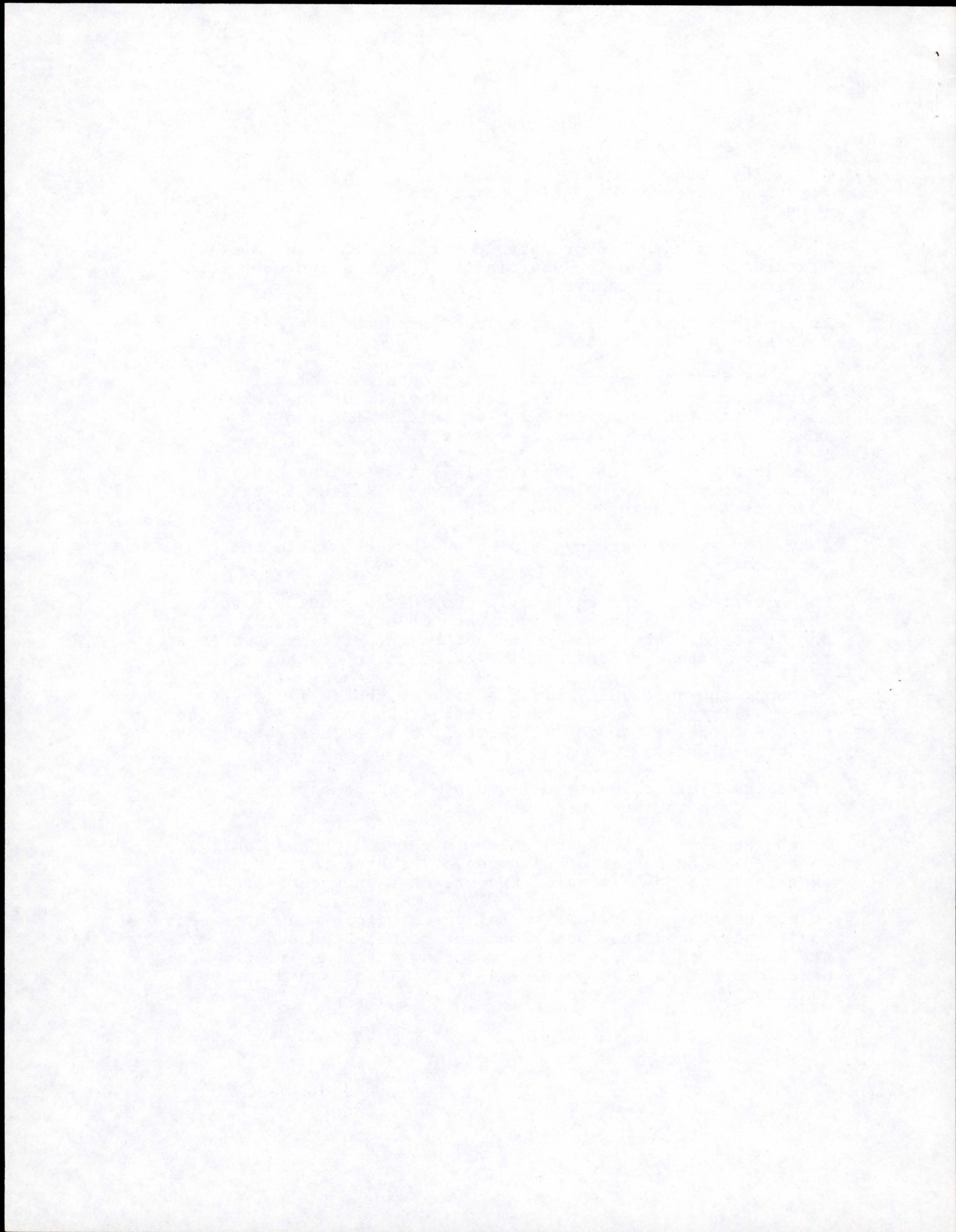
Perhaps, she concluded, "if the folks with the I Timothy model will remain with us and not against us, and we do the same, a creative tension will result that brings the Kingdom a little closer."

After the Bible study, small-group workshops on issues facing women in the church were held.

On the subject of changing roles in the church and family, Anne and Buddy Rosser of Hampton Va., shared their recent experience as co-pastors of two churches in Richmond.

He had been a pastor for several years before Anne ever went to seminary, and they described the cooperation and support necessary from the whole family during the transition. Anne described her role as pastor as "fulfilling" and plans to continue to minister professionally.

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In another group, participants discussed the impact of masculine-dominated vocabulary upon the church as well as society. Leaders Mahan Siler, senior minister, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C., and Judy Eastman, a social worker from Chapel Hill, N.C., encouraged the use of more inclusive language in worship.

In other workshops, Caralie Brown, a lay person from Raleigh, explored partnership in lay ministry; Paula Clayton Dempsey, pastor, Oak Baptist Church, Orange, Va., talked about issues facing women in pastoral roles; and Elizabeth Barnes, Assistant Professor of Theology at Southeastern, discussed authority issues for women.

First-year M.Div. student Lynn Rhoades of Kernersville, N.C. said the conference "heightened my awareness of just what it means to be a woman in ministry and also what it means to be in community with your brother in ministry."

Especially powerful for her was the closing worship service led by Southeastern graduate Peggy Haymes and Margaret Via, pastor, Duke Chapel congregation.

"I felt a real sense of community around the communion table," Rhoades said.

"Women are going to serve," Neil affirmed. "We're trying to address the issues in the context of Southern Baptist churches."

These issues will continue to be addressed next spring during a convocation on women to be held at Southeastern April 2-4, 1987.

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