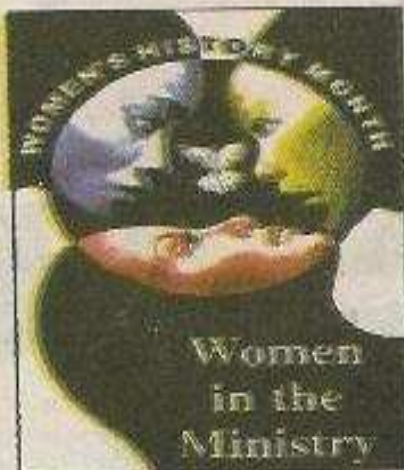


Women in ministry add a unique voice

By Sommer Brokaw
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DURHAM
The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14 that "Women should remain silent in the church." But that scripture hasn't stopped an influx of women from entering the pulpit.

Minister Barbara Williams, founder of Women in Touch Ministries and co-pastor of The Assembly at Durham Christian Center, is one of them.

"As far back as I can remember, it's [been] a thing about men with women preaching because of that scripture," said Katie Tanner, Williams' mom.

But, Williams said times are changing. "God is using more women now," she said. "You can go in the churches and there are more women than men because women are stepping up to the plate."

Still, there is a bias that men are more capable of performing certain duties as an ordained minister.

"Sometimes they don't give us the same respect," Williams said. "I can bury people, I can give wedding services; I have the credentials, but I haven't done it. I guess it's because a person would rather have a man doing the funeral or wedding."

Williams said she was called into the ministry in 1994. She was licensed as an evangelist and ordained in her home church, Union Chapel, in Butler, N.C.

"The belief system in the black community is still rooted in the old traditional where men are supposed to be pastors. She had an uphill battle when God called her into the ministry," said



Williams

Anna Brooks, Williams' sister and overseer of the outreach ministry.

Williams said that she knew it was the right time.

"Timing is key," she said. "When God started tugging on me and let me know it was time, I just had to do it. I preached my initial sermon in 1994, and once I gave that first sermon, that burden was gone."

Williams moved to Durham to earn a degree in secretarial science from Durham Tech. While studying in Durham, she met her husband, Sylvester, who is pastor of the Assembly. They have been married for 30 years.

As a female minister, Williams said she also brings a compassionate heart.

"Women have a softer heart," she said. "I could bring some softness."

Williams was a youth pastor at her home church before she joined her husband at the Assembly. At Union Chapel, she also started Women In Touch Ministry to provide an outlet for women to gather together and fellowship.

"She is strong in what she believes in, and what the lord has called her for. I'm very proud of her," Tanner said.