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Women of Color conference focuses on unity

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More than 100 visitors joined hands with people around them at the sixth annual Women of Color Conference Thursday while listening to the words of Dr. Kweethai Neill, a clinical hypnotherapist and executive director of the iHealth Clinic.

"Send the energies of peace and love and kindness from your spirit to theirs, and in so doing, raise the energy of love, peace and harmony," Neill said.

This year's conference theme was "Women Crossing Cultural Boundaries through Health, Spirituality, and the Arts." NT's Multicultural and Women's Centers cosponsored the conference.

"I believe we can cross the cultures when we focus on the similarities," Cheylon Brown, Multicultural Center director, said. "My desire is that people will have been challenged to think beyond their boxes, to interact with people who at first may not appear to be like them and be propelled to create better relationships with men and women."

The conference featured four keynote speakers throughout the day and various workshops placed in between. Neill spoke first, talking about spiritual health. "A lot of times, we are so focused on body health," Neill said. "Once you get your spiritual health in order, you are able to deal with the day-to-day stresses."

Neill's model for spirituality was GRACE, which stands for Good will to self and others, Rectitude, Acceptance, Compassion and Exuberance.

"When we have a spiritually self-centered balance, our life will be a lot more harmonious and peaceful," Neill said. "I am more spiritual than I am religious. I am colorblind. I don't see color. I don't see race. I don't see religion. I only see the essence of the person connecting with people on a spiritual level."

Dr. Karen Douglas and Helen Carr, both professors with the San Antonio Community College District, spoke together about self-discovery. A luncheon and two sets of workshops followed. The workshops covered

issues such as connections between relationships and domestic violence, drawing as meditation, sizism, stress and yoga.

Neill then moderated a multi-faith panel where women explained their roles in various faith traditions.

At the end of the conference, Presiding Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie of the African Methodist Episcopal Church spoke about the pressures people face in their daily lives.

McKenzie is the first woman to be elected as an African Methodist Episcopal bishop, and consequently, the first woman to be elected as President of African Methodist Episcopal Church's Council of Bishops.

"We must be the ones who have the courage to do what has never been done before," McKenzie said. "We all live under pressure when we work, when we play, when we go to class and when we do homework. We relate to each other, and our entire relationship system is under pressure."

To help relieve pressure, McKenzie offered her seven S's: silence, solitude, sanctuary, sabbatical, service, self and song.

"If even God had to rest on the seventh day, what's wrong with you?" McKenzie asked. "It's OK to take care of yourself."

After the conference, McKenzie signed copies of her book, *Journey to the Well*.

"God knows just how much pressure needs to be applied," McKenzie said.



DAVID MINTON/NT DAILY

Dr. Nia MacKay answers a questions during the panel discussion Thursday.