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eNewsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

Courage Needs to Make a Comeback to Create Change

By Mary E. Hunt

[Posted originally on National Catholic Reporter.](#)

Courage is an old-fashioned virtue that comes in many forms: physical, social and political. I have paid attention to it of late -- both its absence and presence -- in the hope that highlighting courage will make it multiply. A dose of courage would go a long way toward solving many ecclesial and civil problems.

Same-sex love is increasingly seen as part of human diversity, but ugly incidents continue to remind us that courage is still needed to love freely. [Nicholas Coppola](#) had been an active parish volunteer at St. Anthony's Parish in Oceanside, N.Y. He visited the sick, taught, raised money, acted as a lector, even served at the altar as an out gay man. Then someone anonymously reported to the local bishop that Coppola had married his partner.

This prompted an auxiliary bishop to inform the pastor, a Jesuit, that "it would be of concern" if someone teaching in a Catholic parish were known to be married in a same-sex union. Fair enough -- congratulations are in order for the happy couple -- but that was not what he meant. The pastor, claiming no options, relieved Coppola of his volunteer duties. Tens of thousands of people signed petitions in support of this generous man who only wanted to serve. Oddly, the bishop of the diocese of Rockville Centre [mailed the signatures back](#) without explanation.

I do not know any of these people personally. But what if some of them had acted courageously, standing up to a bishop who made a questionable pastoral judgment based on a timid tip? Both the pastor and the auxiliary bishop who did the dirty work for the bishop could have resisted. Imagine if either had refused to participate and simply told the local bishop he could deliver his own ultimatum to a faithful church volunteer. The shame alone might have stopped this unspeakable incident from occurring.

Feminist philosopher Mary Daly said as a person learns to



A Pentecost Prayer: Come, Sophia-Spirit

By Diann L. Neu

Pentecost, fifty days after Easter, celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon her people. It is the birthday of the Christian church. The Holy Spirit's Greek name is Sophia. Wisdom is her English name; *Chokmah* is her Hebrew name; *Sapientia* is her Latin name.

Divine Wisdom, Sophia-Spirit, calls for the liberation of all from patriarchy and kyriarchy. This is what we celebrate today as we bless bread, wine, juice, and food.

Blessed are you, Womb of All Creation, Spirit-Sophia. With joy we give you thanks and praise for creating a diverse world and for creating women in your image.

Come, Sophia-Spirit, come.

Blessed are you, God of our Mothers, Spirit Sophia. You call diverse women to participate in salvation history: Eve, Lilith, Sarah, Hagar, Miriam, Naomi and Ruth, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Tecla, Phoebe, Hildegard of Bingen, Sor Juana, Sojourner Truth, Mother Theodore Guerin, all WATER women, and countless others.

Come, Sophia-Spirit, come.

swim by swimming, you get courage by acting courageously. She meant every dimension of the tautology. Agreed. It takes a certain gumption that these fellows apparently do not have -- at least not yet.

Others have it. The Rev. Thomas Ogletree -- a theological ethicist, Methodist minister and retired dean of Yale Divinity School -- [officialiated his son's same-sex wedding](#). Conservatives in the United Methodist Church are protesting the act.

"Sometimes, when what is officially the law is wrong, you try to get the law changed," Ogletree said. "But if you can't, you break it."

Thomas Ogletree said of his father, "He does the right thing because he believes in doing the right thing. And then, if there is any question about that, he is willing to stand up and place a claim for that in a public way."

That is a succinct definition of courage one parent passed on to his child.

Some people develop courage eventually. Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Religious, [revealed recently](#) he was not involved in the discussions that led the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to order a reform of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, an order that precipitated a massive negative reaction. By his account, the Vatican situation was a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. He admitted humbly with obvious regret that at the time, he "didn't have the courage to speak." Pity, because it might have averted a major rift that will take a long time to repair. But now that he has summoned the courage, I hope the dynamics will begin to change.

Basketball player Jason Collins displayed what one sportswriter called "social courage" by coming out as the first openly gay man in a major professional sport. Good for him. [Billie Jean King](#), [Martina Navratilova](#), [Brittney Griner](#) and scores of other out lesbians in the women's sports world did not merit calls from the president and well-wishers by the thousands, but I will save that for another day. The point is that courage, wherever it is exhibited, is cause for celebration.

Hunger striking prisoners at Guantanamo are a contemporary profile in courage. Regardless of their alleged crimes, it is high time to close the prison. Witness Against Torture has [an active petition campaign](#) designed to spur President Barack Obama to courageous action. What remains to be seen is just what the president's moral tipping point is in a complex situation. Guantanamo is a

Blessed are you, Creator of all seasons and all peoples, Spirit-Sophia. You call us to be prophets, teachers, house church leaders, ministers, saints, and to image your loving and challenging presence. *Come, Sophia-Spirit, come.*

Blessed are you, Companion on the Journey, Spirit-Sophia. In your abundant love you welcome all to come and dine. You proclaim from the rooftops, "Come and eat my bread, drink the wine which I have drawn." *Come, Sophia-Spirit, come.*

Come, Holy Sister, Spirit-Sophia, upon this bread, wine, juice, and food. Come as breath and breathe your life anew into our aching bones. Come as wind and refresh our weary souls. Come as fire and purge us and our communities of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and all evils. *Come, Sophia-Spirit, come.*

As we eat, drink, and enjoy the Pentecost banquet, may Sophia-Spirit rise within us like a rushing wind. May Sophia-Spirit spark the churches like a revolutionary fire. May Sophia-Spirit flow through the world like a life-giving breath. Amen. Blessed be. May it be so.

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Upcoming Programs

May 22: Teleconference with Marie M. Fortune, Jeanette Stokes, Diann L. Neu, and Mary E. Hunt on ["A Century of Creative Feminist Leadership in Religion."](#) 1:00 PM EDT

- RSVP with "Register Me Teleconference" by Tuesday, May 21 to waterstaff@waternetwork.org

long, drawn-out political disaster that has been simplified quite dramatically by the unspeakable force-feeding of courageous inmates. Sometimes courage comes too late.

Anne McGrew Bennett, one of the great pioneers of feminist theology, was courageous on multiple levels. She was arrested for disorderly conduct trying to speak with draft records officials in 1970; was relentless in her efforts to bring about inclusive symbols and images in Christian prayer, worship and theology; and was a founder of the Gray Panthers.

"She insisted on things that other people postponed insisting on," her son said. Timing is all in acts of courage.

I ponder how or if one can compel another to act courageously. Do we have the right to expect that mere human beings will surmount self-interest and act for the common good? I am not naïve about how complicated many decisions are -- weighing competing goods, preventing bad outcomes, limiting damage, and all the other complexities that make up a moral calculus. But I do know courage needs to come back into fashion in a big way in our wired time if we expect positive change.

Mary E. Hunt, mhunt@hers.com, is a feminist theologian who is co-founder and co-director of WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, MD

WATER Teleconference

"A Century of Creative Feminist Leadership in Religion"

with Marie M. Fortune, Jeanette Stokes, Diann L. Neu, and Mary E. Hunt

Wednesday, May 22, 2013 1 pm – 2 pm EDT

- In 1977, **Marie M. Fortune** founded **FaithTrust Institute** to mobilize faith communities to address sexual and domestic violence.
- In 1977, **Jeanette Stokes** founded the **Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South** (RCWMS) to support women in and entering ministry and to weave feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world.
- In 1983, **Mary E. Hunt** and **Diann L. Neu** founded the **Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual** (WATER) in response to the need for theological, ethical,

June 3: Contemplative Prayer with Cheryl Nichols, 7:30 PM EDT

June 12: Teleconference with Monica A. Coleman, 1:00 PM EDT

July 8: Contemplative Prayer with Janis Roihl, 7:30 PM EDT

July 10: Teleconference with Grace Ji-Sun Kim on "Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit," 1:00 PM EDT

September 9: Contemplative Prayer, 7:30 PM EDT

September 11: Teleconference with Linn Marie Tonstad, 1:00 PM EDT

October 7: Contemplative Prayer, 7:30 PM EDT

October 9: Teleconference with Urvashi Vaid, 1:00 PM EDT

and liturgical development for and by women.

Together, these modest non-profit organizations have logged more than a century of progressive feminist work for justice.

These colleagues will reflect on their founding visions, their struggles and challenges to keep small, stalwart organizations flourishing, and their strategies to create new platforms necessary to extend and expand this justice work.

Join in the conversation that is sure to be lively—with tales of shared history, common concerns, and that spark that makes entrepreneurs create and sustain their efforts!

Email “Register Me Teleconference”
to waterstaff@waterwomensalliance.org by Tuesday, May 21st in order to receive dial-in information.



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