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waterwheel

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

Religious Collusion

Mary E. Hunt

Religious pluralism is a happy fact of contemporary life. But its shadow side, religious collusion, is becoming increasingly hard to ignore. It is the dynamic of religious groups making common cause on issues that oppress even though they find little else on which they agree. Two recent instances illustrate my concern.

Successful efforts to overturn the legislation of same-sex marriage in California by voting for Proposition 8 showed how Mormons and Catholics, odd bedfellows, could combine their considerable resources to bring about the social change they wanted. Although Mormons make up only 2% of Californians and Catholics 31%, they were disproportionately represented in the forces unleashed to pass Prop 8.

The *New York Times* reported: "First approached by the Roman Catholic archbishop of San Francisco a few weeks after the California Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in May, the Mormons were the last major religious group to join the campaign, and the final spice in an unusual stew that included Catholics, evangelical Christians, conservative black and Latino pastors, and myriad smaller ethnic groups with strong religious ties. Shortly after receiving the invitation from the San Francisco Archdiocese, the Mormon leadership in Salt Lake City issued a four-paragraph decree to be read to congregations, saying "the formation of families is central to the Creator's plan," and urging members to become involved with the cause ("Mormons Tipped Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage," by Jesse McKinkley and Kirk Johnson, November 14, 2008). San Francisco Archbishop George Niederaur was bishop for a decade in Salt Lake City so he knew the players and how to get on the scorecard.

Tens of millions of dollars were raised on both sides of the issue, with religious groups contributing a large proportion. But more important than money in this case was activism. Mormons walked the neighborhoods to bring their anti-same-sex marriage message door to door. They had a sophisticated strategy that included different scripts depending on the initial response of the resident. If s/he believed that marriage was instituted by God, they told the person that Prop 8 would bring it back; if s/he believed that marriage was a human institution, they told the person that Prop 8 would restore it to its "original" heterosexual form. Catholics were treated to sermons and other official pronouncements against same-sex marriage.

This unusual show of ecumenical solidarity is a dangerous recipe. The Catholics obviously had the numbers, the Mormons the money. Together, and with the support of voters who were persuaded by their anti-gay ideology, they were able to win the day. I worry that they will turn this same combination on women's reproductive options or any number of other issues that will constrain the rights of others.

Successful efforts to overturn the legislation of same-sex marriage in California by voting for Proposition 8 showed how Mormons and Catholics, odd bedfellows, could combine their considerable resources ...

Religious collusion showed up again, this time at the international level, when the French government introduced a resolution to

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(l. to r.) Emily Derstine, Intern Fall 2008; Anna Roeschley, Associate 2007-9; and Sophie Kanter, Summer Intern 2007 enjoy a Harvest sing-a-long in the WATER office. They performed their repertoire on a Happy 80th Birthday phone call to feminist theologian Mary Daly. What a fun way to work!

Become a WATER Intern, Associate or Visiting Scholar

Become part of a community where feminism, religion, and social justice intersect.

WATER is accepting applications for 2009 internships and visiting scholar opportunities. We offer exciting possibilities for college and graduate students, or for women on sabbatical or needing a pause from work as usual.

Summer Internships run for a minimum of six weeks, during the period between May 19 and July 31, 2009. Interns work in the WATER office, learn with the WATER staff, and enjoy all that Washington, DC, has to offer, especially during an election year!

Visiting Scholar opportunities, Associateships, and Internships can be designed to meet your needs and WATER's.

For more information and an application, visit WATER's Web site, or contact Anna at *annabeth@hers.com* or 301.589.2509.

Editorial

Hope is contagious. So as the New Year and the new U.S. administration come into focus, sidle up to someone hopeful and see if you can catch it!

The downside of hope is not so much despair as disappointment, the sense of hopes unfulfilled rather than hopes dashed. It is avoiding disappointment that will be the challenge for progressive people who have lived with low expectations for so long that we hardly dare embrace the sources of our hope for lack of knowing how.

With hope comes new questions: How do we balance competing moral claims when it comes to the economy? Who can be excluded—same-sex partners perhaps—so that "we" move forward? What commitments can we trade away so that evangelicals and others can sit at the same table? Does democracy mean always having to accommodate those with whom we disagree?

These are tough questions. But they are the new questions for the New Year and the new U.S. administration. There are more where they came from. At least we are asking the ones that give us hope.

Double *WATERwheel* Issue

You may have noticed that this is a double issue of *WATERwheel, Vol. 19, No. 3-4*. It is meant to complete Volume 19 in 2008.

As part of our 25th Anniversary strategic planning we are doing a technology update and taking a look at our eco footprint. We are asking a lot of questions and are not sure yet of the answers.

What form should *WATERwheel* take? Is an E-newsletter beneficial to you and the WATER community? Do we need an Email-Now program? What should be on our Web site? Would you read our blog? Will you donate online? Can we thank you by email?

Email us at water@hers.com and let us know what you think.

Greetings, President Barack Obama!

At this historic time, WATER rejoices in the election of Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States of America.

We wish him, his family, and all who will serve in his administration luck, health, and safety for the years ahead.

We join him in the hope that this nation and the world will enjoy justice, peace, and shared abundance through the hard work and generous spirits of all. It is a new day and we are glad.

Next we need to develop ways to bring our children into conversation and collaboration as we create the flip side of religious collusion before it is too late.

Religious Collusion

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the United Nations calling member nations to decriminalize homosexuality. On December 18, 2008, 66 of the 192 member countries of the UN introduced a declaration urging states "to take all necessary measures, in particular legislative or administrative, to ensure that sexual orientation or gender identity may under no circumstances be the basis for criminal penalties, in particular executions, arrests or detention." This measure was necessary in light of the fact that homosexuality is still banned in 77 countries and punishable by death in seven (including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, among others). The UN's own Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1). So the body was simply extending its own mandate to another endangered group.

The declaration was not adopted despite support from the members of the European Union, Israel, and Brazil. It was defeated with opposition from the U.S., China, and Russia. Leading the charge once again were religious leaders, principally the Holy See which, as the governing body of the Roman Catholic Church, has permanent observer status at the UN. Most progressives believe that it ought to have non-governmental organization (NGO) status like other religious bodies. Imagine the outcry if the United Church of Christ or the Unitarian Universalists were treated as a sovereign nation? While lacking a vote in the General Assembly, the Holy See can and does intervene in debates and politick with the best of them to have its view hold sway.

That is precisely what happened this time around. The declaration was voted down because the Vatican sowed the seeds of opposition. It claimed that if accepted, the statement might mean that same-sex marriage, adoption by LGBTQ people, and/or assisted reproductive technologies would have to be made available to everyone. Perish the thought of equality! Instead, the Vatican charmed its Muslim colleagues into seeing that their religious sensibilities would be offended in equal measure. Their joint efforts were enough to tip the balance away from justice one more time.

This kind of common cause resulting in oppression is ironic especially between Muslim and Catholic leaders who have lost no love on one another in other settings. Recall Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg in Germany when he spoke controversially about Muhammad. He suggested that the Prophet urged the use of violence to spread the Muslim faith, apparently forgetting the Crusades. The reality is that Catholic and Muslim officialdoms have found few points of theological intersection. At earlier women's and development conferences they successfully rounded up their religious sycophants to block consensus on reproductive health issues.

I observe several similar dynamics in these instances. First, the religious groups have very little in common on the positive side, but cling to one another over what they hate in common. This is a distasteful way to be religious. Second, they are unabashedly political in their efforts to achieve their goals. Thus they need to be treated as political entities and not hide behind their religious skirts when it comes to the rough and tumble of politics. Third, their leaders achieve and maintain their power by holding positions and expecting others to adhere to positions that oppress. This is a dubious formula for leadership. Finally, they seem to limit their focus to women and LGBTQ people, implying that marginalized people are fair game for their theo-politics. This bodes badly for the future when one hopes that the Obama administration will seek to assure rights that the religious collusionists will counter.

My major concern is how to act differently as religious people. Feminists prove that engaging across religious lines in constructive efforts to do the work of justice (like the FaithTrust Institute that seeks to eradicate sexual and domestic violence using resources of several traditions) is a far more authentic form of religious pluralism. Finding ways to pray and worship together are challenging and useful for building coalitions. Next we need to develop ways to bring our children into conversation and collaboration as we create the flip side of religious collusion before it is too late.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., is cofounder and codirector of WATER.

Inspiring WATER Wo/men

Mary E. Hunt

This begins an occasional column on Alliance colleagues. Two who inspire are Louise Lears and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. I will profile others in future issues, always welcoming suggestions from readers of women (and men) to include.

Eleanor Roosevelt is alleged to have said, "A woman is like a tea bag. You never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water." Although I cannot track down the source, I can imagine that it might have been used **about** Eleanor as readily as **by** her.

Louise Lears, SC

Louise Lears, a Sister of Charity from Cincinnati, has shown her strength in the face of ecclesio-genic problems; she knows hot water.

Louise was a valued part of the pastoral team at St. Cronan's Parish in St. Louis, Missouri, involved in creative collaborative ministry. Archbishop Raymond Burke placed her under interdict for her good work, including her support of the ordination of Roman Catholic WomenPriests and her presence at one of their ordinations held in a synagogue. He promptly decamped for Rome where he now heads one of the congregations that could possibly lift the interdict. How do you spell "double jeopardy"?

Interdict is a theological anachronism, a throwback to times when church authorities expressed their wrath against persons and communities that failed to do their bidding. Some hierarchs apparently are still living in former times. In Louise's case, interdict means that she had to leave her ministry in St. Louis and is barred from receiving the sacraments under most circumstances. It means a public repudiation of the values and commitments she holds. It is an implicit attack on her entire congregation that obviously cannot—thanks be to God, will not—"control" its members.

Issues at hand include the primacy of conscience, the right to assemble, the misuse of ecclesiastical power, and the notion of excluding anyone from sacramental life of a "discipleship of equals." The human right to express one's own opinion is in the balance. Strong condemnation of the ecclesial action as well as strong support for Louise Lears continue to be expressed.

Louise has moved to Baltimore, MD, to accompany her aging mother. There she is finding a new community of justice-seekers, new expressions of her feminist ministry. It is tragic that kyriarchal church officials still have the power to disrupt lives. But when they do it is helpful to put the shame where it belongs—on those who oppress—and to lift up those who stand for justice. WATER's recent Solidari-Tea with Louise was a chance to do just that.

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Another WATER woman of substance is the beloved evangelical feminist **Virginia Ramey Mollenkott**. She and her partner Judith Suzannah Tilton recently moved to an assisted living center in New Jersey so it was a good time to deposit Virginia's papers in the archives at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, via the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at Pacific School of Religion. The celebration was held at Union Theological Seminary in New York City for Virginia's convenience, making it possible for a lot of East Coast friends to gather.

Virginia is well known to *WATERwheel* readers. Her classic book *Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?* (written with Letha Scanzoni in 1974, revised 1994) provided a sound biblical basis for accepting the queer next door as well as the queer within. Many an evangelical Christian is in her debt. Her *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism* (1992, now revised and expanded with a new preface, 2008) made more than sense to feminist readers. While she was "coming out from fundamentalism," her sisters had to grapple with the Bible whether we wanted to our not. Many a feminist theologian thanks her. Her poetic pen and wise counsel on the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* project made that effort successful. Thank her every time you hear scripture read in inclusive terms.

Virginia's work on trans issues was the logical next step of her innovative approach. As she came to know and love transgender friends, and never being one to shirk from insights despite how unpopular they might be, she opened the discussion of transgender issues in Christian theology with her landmark book *Omnigender: A Trans-religious Approach* (2001). She demonstrated that human experience and the sciences inform a new anthropology: The binaries are gone; sex and gender categories are tossed to the wind. Enter theology: Trans people are God's people. What results is a new ethical playing field where all of us know far less about ourselves than we thought we did. Thanks to the honest, candid work of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, none of us can say "LGBT" anything without being changed not by the concept but by the reality of trans people.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

In each instance, she took on an unpopular issue, incurring the wrath of those into whose comfort zone she trespassed. Eventually, she won over many who were slower to see the love and justice, not to mention common sense, inherent in her claims. Imagine the evangelicals who thought that this Bob Jones University grad was one of them, only to realize she was, and a lesbian to boot. Imagine the feminists who thought she was one of us, only to realize she was, and a skillful theological interpreter of biblical texts as well. Imagine those inclusive language proponents who thought she was one of them, only to realize she was, and that "neither male nor female" had new meaning through her eyes. Imagine those lesbian, gay, or bisexual people who thought she was one of them, only to discover that she was, and trans too. And think of those Christians who thought she was solidly theirs until they realized that this evangelical finds inspiration in Buddhism as well.

There she goes again, breaking new ground and graciously bringing the rest of us along. Her work continues and endures as we deepen and extend it in ours.

Louise, Virginia, and so many more make for hot WATER.

(l. to r.) Speakers Keri Day and Susan Abraham.

Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Meeting

The annual meeting of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network was held on October 31, 2008, in Chicago in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion meeting. More than 45 scholars, students, and activists gathered just before the historical presidential election. As always, the introductions revealed a wide range of projects in which participants are involved, demonstrating the many ways that feminist liberation work in religion can be taught, written about, funded, and otherwise embodied by committed colleagues.

Provocative presentations on the problems raised by using "feminism" as a name or a brand kicked off discussion. Susan Abraham of Harvard Divinity School focused on naming as a strategy, not a theory, something that emerges from a context, not something that can be taught. Rosemary Carbine of Whittier College used U.S. Catholic examples to explore her view of the topic, suggesting the importance of reinvention. Keri Day of Vanderbilt University emphasized the policy dimensions of feminist analysis with an eye toward multiple forms of human flourishing rather than getting caught in the limits of identity politics.

All three speakers raised key issues which sparked intense discussion in small groups and in the plenary session that followed. As usual, the session was informative and enjoyable. The short presentations and time for direct conversations stand in sharp contrast to the usual format at professional meetings where one only sees the back of the head of the person in the row in front.

A second meeting of the FLTN was held at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 21, 2008. Next year's topic is "liberation" when a similar deconstruction of the term will be on the agenda.

If you wish to receive periodic updates from the FLTN, join the Google Group on *www.google.com* or contact Anna Roeschley, *annabeth@hers.com*. If you are already on the list, feel free to post to it so that we can keep one another informed about our work.

News from Women-Church

Women-Church Convergence is made up of representatives of twenty-six Catholic-rooted feminist groups and organizations. Women-Church Convergence urges all Catholics to resist the Catholic hierarchy's intrusions on conscience and instead to build a community in which conscience is respected.

Women-Church on Top of the Issues

The Women-Church Convergence met in Chicago, October 10-12, 2008, for its annual educational and networking session.

Mary Ellen O'Dea presented "Cool Globes," a creative approach to climate change. Using the resources of a Chicago-based exhibit of globes of all sorts, she invited participants to interact with the artwork and learn the basics of energy conservation.

Eighth Day Center for Justice collaborators Liz Deligio and Kathleen Desautels brought their eco-feminist perspectives to the work of Thomas Berry and others. They invited the Convergence members to think about what was left out of the Universe Story, how it could be better used to spark a broad social justice agenda.

The Convergence expressed its support for the freedom of religion for Catholics. This is especially important during an election season when some bishops manifest confusion about how many votes they each get (one apiece!), and who decides who receives Communion. It also voiced its support for freedom of conscience in the face of violations of same in the cases of Louise Lears and Roy Bourgeois who were penalized for their support of the ordination of women.

A creative liturgy capped the weekend. Rose Mary Meyer and other Chicago friends focused attention on water as a precious, scarce, and sometimes polluted resource that exemplifies the fragility of our ecosystem. The sharing of small drinks of water brought to mind how cavalierly we treat this commodity, without which we would not exist.

Future plans include similar such meetings in local settings including the Bay Area, Washington, DC, and various parts of the Midwest.

Press Release:

Catholic Feminist Coalition Denounces Vatican's Intrusion on Conscience

At its annual meeting in Chicago, October 10-12, 2008, Women-Church Convergence denounced all threats to and violations of conscience perpetuated by leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. The Convergence affirmed the right of all Catholics to act in the areas of faith and morals on the basis of a well-informed conscience.

Several examples scandalized us of late:

1. Louis Lears was removed from the pastoral team of St. Cronan's Parish by Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of St. Louis, Missouri, for her support of the ordination of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. He placed her under interdict, prohibiting her from the reception of the sacraments. This is direct retribution for an act of conscience.

2. Roy Bourgeois received a canonical warning and was asked to explain to his Maryknoll Community the facts of his participation in an ordination sponsored by Roman Catholic WomenPriests. A report of the order's investigation was sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This contradicts freedom of conscience.

3. During this election season, several politicians have been threatened with excommunication by bishops who disagree with their principled stances on controversial issues. These are attempts to politicize a Catholic's right in conscience to receive the Eucharist.

(l. to r.) Janet Walton, Susan Roll, Diann Neu, and Martha Ann Kirk at the Feminist Studies in Liturgy Seminar at the American Academy of Liturgy Meeting in Baltimore, MD, January 2009.

Theresa Kane, RSM, and Mary E. Hunt enjoy one another during Mary and Diann Neu's seminar "Living a Post-Clerical Church—Theologies and Strategies" at Call to Action in Milwaukee, WI, November 2008.

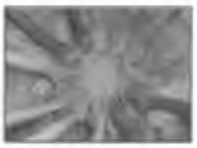
The ritual table for WATER's "Women's Harvest Festival." Imagine shades of red in this photo: red cloth in the basket of many breads, red apples, red corn, different reds on the candle, and three red flames.

Silence, Song, and Salutations: Feminist Spiritual Practices with WATER

Anna Roeschley

The autumn months brought a fresh wave of local women through the WATER doors, with the initiation of our Feminist Spiritual Practices series. Sharing warm cups of tea on Wednesday evenings, women of multiple generations gathered for contemplative prayer and communal silence, while others took part in multi-faith rituals celebrating the autumn equinox, thanksgiving, and the winter solstice. Still others were drawn together by the light of the full moon to practice moon salutations (a series of yoga poses) and share reflections from the grass of the National Mall. While all in a similar vein, each of these three monthly gatherings had its own unique way of engaging women in feminist spiritual practice.

In the Contemplative Prayer circle, we were reminded of the power of deep silence that sustains activism and social change. It is in such silence that we become aware of the energy and insight we share with a much wider circle working to transform society.



With our dancing, candle-lighting, music-making, story-telling, and sharing of good flavors and nourishing words, the Women's Ritual group found tangible ways to commemorate the seasons at hand. Such rituals reflect the sacred in the ordinary, everyday elements of our lives and help create space for living that is balanced and grounded.

With the full moon rising over the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument rising behind, Moon Sisters gathered to reconnect with the rhythmic cycles linking women's bodies, the earth, and the moon. It is no small symbolic act that our moonlit yoga took place in a center of such great power, one gravely in need of the rejuvenation and healing, holistic energy that moon salutations bring to our bodies and to our earth.

As a new U.S. administration rises, we pray that this kind of energy and rejuvenation will be at work. May we have the energy to continue influencing such work, and may we continue grounding it in the spiritual practice that makes it so.

WATER looks forward to continuing these opportunities for feminist spiritual practice in 2009, and we hope you will join us, for one or for them all. If you cannot come, we invite you to join your own spiritual practice to ours.

Feminist Spiritual Practices at WATER, Winter 2009

Contemplative Prayer: January 14, February 11, March 11

Women's Ritual: January 28, February 25, March 25

The above two groups meet at WATER on Wednesdays at 7.30pm. The WATER office will be open at 7.00pm for tea and conversation. RSVP to annabeth@hers.com or call 301.589.2509.

Moon Sisters: January 11 at 6.30pm, February 8 at 7.30pm, March 10 at 7.30pm

Moon Sisters meet on the Mall at the Smithsonian Metro stop, east exit. Please RSVP to annabeth@hers.com or call 301.589.2509.

The Feas
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The first day of February is Brigit's Day, a major feast of the Celtic year. Brigit inherited the name and characteristics of the goddess Brigit, whose feast was at Imbolc, February 1. She was said to "breathe life into the mouth of the dead winter." She is an ancient role model for women today.

Use this ritual as a model for your community or as a meditation for yourself. May you enjoy praying with Brigit!

Special thanks to Mary Condren of the Institute for Feminism and Religion in Dublin, Ireland, for her groundbreaking work on Brigit. We are indebted to her for many of the ideas contained in this ritual. For an excellent guide to planning and preparing Brigit's festivals, see www.instituteforfeminismandreligion.org.

Note: Brigit is known by many names. There are several spellings of her name that you will notice in this text. However, the old Irish name is Brigit. Brighid (Breed) is the modern Irish, and Brigid is a modern hybrid!

Preparation

Place an oil lamp or candle, a bowl of water, Brigit's cross, cloth for Brigit's cloak, Irish soda bread, a glass of milk, a bowl of honey, and napkins in the center of a circle.

Welcome and Naming

Welcome to "The Feast of Brigit." In the Celtic calendar, February 1, Brigit's Day, marks the beginning of spring. Brigit was said to "breathe life into the mouth of the dead winter." This time is also the festival of Imbolc—a time when new lambs are born and old hearts awake to new life.

According to Celtic spirituality, women's power was most manifest in Brigit of Ireland, goddess, saint, and threshold figure, bridging the worlds between rich and poor, pagan and Christian, slave and free. Celtic spirituality is women centered. It is a way of life that is intimate with the earth, her cycles, and the goddesses associated with them.

Let us begin by naming our circle. Speak your name and share what comes to your mind when you think of Brigit of Ireland: goddess and saint. *(Sharing)*

Brigit's Fire

(One person lights an oil lamp or candle.)

Brigit's Arrow Invocation, Traditional

Most Holy Brigit, Excellent Woman,
Bright Arrow, Sudden Flame;
May your bright fiery Sun take us swiftly
to your lasting kin-dom.

Brigit Chant: Music based on the traditional Irish air "*Casadh an tSugain* (Twisting the Straw)" on *Celtic Dreamland* by Putumayo.

Music: do–re / do–re / do–re–mi / do–re–do–do.
Words: Bri–ghid / Bri–ghid / Bri- -ghid / Bri- - - -ghid.
In Circle: 4 steps right / 4 left / gather up / release.

Ritual of Bhrat Brid

Having kindled Brigit's fire, we now invite Brigit to come among us and share her story. First, we must make her welcome. She calls to us three times saying, "*Téigí ar bhur nglúine agus osclaigí bhur súile agus ligigí isteach Brid,*" meaning "Go on your knees and open your eyes and let Brigit enter." (A shorter way to say this is *"Ligigí isteach Brid" (Phonetic: "Liggiggee istyock Vreed")*. After each call, we respond, *"Sé beatha" (Phonetic: "Shay vaha," meaning "She is welcome"). Call three times.*

Brigit: "*Ligigí isteach* Brid" (*Phonetic: "Liggiggee istyock Vreed"*).
Response: *"Sé beatha"* (*Phonetic: "Shay vaha"*).

Finally, after the third time, Brigit enters the room and dances among the women, giving them her blessing. Afterwards she takes a seat among them.

Another variation is to have the youngest woman/girl stand outside the room with the cloak, calling three times as above. Finally, after the third time, the girl enters carrying the cloak and places the cloak on the altar or centerpiece. The girl can be followed by other young girls carrying oats and/or rushes.

Brigit's Story

Greetings, Sisters! I am Brigit of Ireland. The stories and legends about me run deep and wide, but I will highlight a few for you.

I was born in the middle of 5th century A.D. My mother was the slave-woman of a chieftain, whose wife made him sell my mother to a Druid while she was still pregnant with me. Thus, I was born into a Druid household and taught the secrets of the old religion by my stepfather. It is said that my Druid stepfather had a vision that I was to be named after the great goddess Brigit.

Ancient Brigit was goddess of the hearth and of the sacred practice of smithcraft, which involved the mastering of fire. Because I channel Brigit's characteristics, I am known as the Mistress of the Mantle, represent fire and sun, and am also seen as a sister, companioning figure. Some believe I was the midwife to Mary and the foster-mother to Jesus.

The context of my birth has great significance. I was born during a transitional time, as Ireland was moving from a time of the old religion into an era where St. Patrick and others were bringing the message of Christianity to the people. I was also born in a transitional location, the place of the threshold.

It is said that my mother was carrying a pitcher of milk at the time, probably coming in from milking the cows. As she crossed the threshold into the house, she gave birth to me, in a place neither in nor out, neither day nor night. In Celtic spirituality, thresholds are seen as sacred places where the veil between heaven and earth seems especially thin and people feel keenly the presence of the sacred. Even today, many hang my cross on their threshold or hearth to seek my blessing and to remember that the sacred is part of our everyday life.

Later in my life I returned to my real father's house. He and his sons tried to force me to marry, but I refused. Instead, I was the first person to free and organize Irish women into Christian communities.

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I also founded a famous monastery in Kildare, which housed a sacred flame until well into the 16th century. As the story goes, I asked a rich man for land to build the monastery. He offered to give me a site as far as my cloak would reach. When I spread my cloak it encompassed all of Kildare.

Thus became the tradition of placing newly woven cloth outside one's home on the Eve of Brigit for my spirit to pass over it. It is then torn into strips and offered to loved ones for healing. This blessing is my gift to tired and weary spirits coming through the darkness of winter.

Brigit's Chant: Repeat as above.

Brigit's Cloak

The cloak of Brigit symbolizes her generous spirit. Receive this piece of Brigit's cloak for protection, for healing your body and spirit, and to keep the flame of the spirit of Brigit alive for you this year. When you receive the cloak, say the blessing, *"Fay Vrat Breedja Shin,"* meaning "We are under Brigit's cloak." *(Pass the cloak around.)*

Brigit Chant: *"Fé Bhrat Brighde Sinn,"* a round, meaning "Under Brigit's Cloak Are We."

Music: do – mi / mi – re – ti / do.
Words: *Fé / bhrat Brighde / sinn*
Music: mi - so / so - fa – re / mi.
Words: *Fé / bhrat Brighde / sinn*
Music: so – do' / do' – la – fa / so.
Words: *Fé / bhrat Brighde / sinn*
Music: do – mi / mi – re – ti / do.
Words: *Fé / bhrat Brighde / sinn*

Brigit's Well

(One person touches the water and lets it flow through her hands.)

As Abbess of her vast monastery, Brigit performed many miracles of healing using water. There are hundreds of holy wells in Ireland and Europe dedicated to her that have healing properties.

Let us pass the bowl of water around. The original Imbolc ceremony involved washing hands, face, and feet. Wash your hands and face to prepare yourself to receive healing from Brigit. *(Pass water and towel)*

Brigit Chant: *"Fé Bhrat Brighde Sinn,"* chant using *"Fé tobar Brighde sinn."*

Brigit's Cross

Brigit was a form of the sun goddess, and her symbolism remains attached to the sun in the form of Brigit's crosses. On the eve of Brigit's Day, January 31st, people honor her memory by weaving crosses from rushes or straw. These "Brigit's Crosses" are believed to bestow the saint's special blessing on their households. On February 1st the old cross is burned and the new cross replaces the old one above the door, hung each year to protect the house from fire. *(One person hangs Brigit's Cross and prays:)*

Holy Brigit, watch over this house
and this community.
Mother of the Earth and Sun,
Keep us safe and keep us warm.
Give your blessing to each one.

Brigit Chant: *"Fé Bhrat Brighde Sinn,"* chant using *"Fé cros Brighde sinn."*

Ritual of Bread, Milk, Honey

In Brigit's role as Mother Goddess, one of her symbols is that of a cow. She is often depicted carrying a milk pail. The milk of the Sacred Cow was one of the earliest sacred foods throughout the world, equivalent to our present day communion. Milk represented the ideal form of food for its purity and nourishment. Milk from the Sacred Cow was believed to provide an antidote to the poison of weapons. Mother's milk was especially valuable and was believed to have curative powers.

Take a piece of Irish soda bread and dip it in milk and then in honey. As we eat, let us pray Brigit's Table Grace.

Brigit's Table Grace from St. Brigid's Monastery in Kildare, Ireland

I should like a great lake of finest ale
for all the people.
I should like a table of the choicest foods
for the family of heaven.
Let the ale be made from the fruits of faith,
and the food be for giving love.
I should welcome the poor to my feast,
for they are God's children.
I should welcome the sick to my feast
for they are God's joy.
Let the poor sit with Sophia at the highest place
and the sick dance with the angels.
Bless the poor, bless the sick,
bless our human race.
Bless our food, bless our drink, all homes,
O God embrace.

Brigit Chant: *"Fé Bhrat Brighde Sinn,"* chant using *"Fé tabla Brighde sinn."*

Reflection

What do you resonate with in these stories of Brigit? What aspects of Brigit's life do you relate to in your own? *(Sharing)*

Brigit's Blessing by Barbara Callan

Let us create a circle and receive Brigit's blessing.

May Brigit's flame give you inspiration.
May Brigit's girdle give you healing.
May Brigit's creativity guide your way.

Recipe for Irish Soda Bread

Mix 4 c. flour, 1 tsp. salt, 1 tsp. baking soda, 1-1/2 tsp. baking powder, 1 c. sugar. Add 1-1/2 c. raisins and 1/4 lb. softened butter. In a separate bowl, mix 3 eggs and 1 c. buttermilk. Add to above mixture. Bless the dough by cutting a cross into it. Bake at 350° for 1 hour in an iron skillet.

© Diann L. Neu, D.Min., is cofounder and codirector of WATER. Anna Roeschley is a WATER Associate for 2007-9.

$$ Ways to Support WATER $$

We are working hard to keep the spirit of religious feminists alive by honoring WATER's tradition of excellence in creating rituals, lectures, and networks.

You make the difference in our work. Gifts from friends are crucial to WATER's future and can be made in a variety of ways.

Gifts: You can give by check, credit card, online, gifts of stock, IRA rollovers, or electronic funds transfer. Give monthly!

Matching Gifts: Many employers will match your charitable contributions. Check with your employer for more information.

Planned Gifts: You may also choose to remember WATER in your will or estate plan.

However you decide to contribute, please know that your generosity is appreciated and will go a long way in keeping WATER vibrant and securing our future work. For more information on making a gift, please contact Diann Neu at *dneu@hers.com* or 301.589.2509.

Become a WATERcarrier. Give Monthly.

WATERcarrier, n., one who gives assistance; an ally, teammate, colleague, supporter, collaborator, benefactor, sustainer; a source of strength; one who empowers.

Consider becoming a monthly WATERcarrier donor to celebrate WATER's 25th Anniversary. In addition to providing a steady stream of support to our feminist community working for social and religious change, you also:

- Benefit from the convenience of donating monthly, quarterly, or as you are able.
- Decrease your eco-footprint by minimizing the number of mailings sent.
- Enhance your contribution as more of it goes directly to our programs.

If you are interested in adding to the stream of feminists "carrying" the work of WATER, please call 301.589.2509 or email *waterstaff@hers.com* today, or simply mail in the following reply form. We look forward to hearing from you!

WATERcarrier Monthly Giving Enrollment Form

Dear Mary, Diann, and the WATER community,

✓ **Yes!** I accept your invitation to become a WATERcarrier to celebrate WATER's 25th Anniversary. Here is my tax-deductible monthly gift of:

☐$10 ☐$20 ☐$25 ☐$50 ☐$100 or ☐$_____.

I prefer to donate by one of the following:

☐Automatic Bank Transfer. I have enclosed a check for my first contribution. (Automatic transfers will begin the following month.) Signature required_____

☐Credit Card. I prefer to pay by credit card each month. (Go to *www.hers.com/water*, click the "Donate" button at the top and then the orange "Donate" button.)

☐Please sign me up for WATER email.

☐Please send monthly donation envelopes.

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WATER's Wish List

If you or your office can make these wishes come true, please call Anna or Diann, 301.589.2509. Thanks.

- Laptop computers
- Monthly donors
- Printer cartridges for HP
- Smart phones
- Monthly rent
- $1 million dollar donor
- Volunteer Web maven for our Web site
- $30/month for EmailNow program
- Reams of copy paper
- Volunteers

No more checks and stamps required: Make online donations and purchases!

WATER has responded to *your* requests and to the technological advances of the 21st century! We now offer you the ability to make your donations to WATER through PayPal. PayPal is a safe and secure way to transfer money to and from your bank account without having to expose your credit card to the merchant.

Through PayPal, you have the option of paying by credit card or by having money transferred from your bank account, which requires signing up for a PayPal account. Many businesses and nonprofits are using PayPal, so you will benefit from using PayPal not only with WATER but with other organizations, too.

Save time, energy, postage, and paper—try it out today. Go to *www.hers.com/water*, click the "Donate" button at the top and then the orange "Donate" button. We hope to have all of our resources available for online purchase soon, so be on the lookout!

GoodSearch & GoodShop

Reminder: Donate to WATER While Surfing the Web

You can give money to WATER every time you search the Internet. Just use the search engine *GoodSearch.com*, powered by Yahoo!, which donates 50% of its advertising revenue to the nonprofits and schools selected by its users.

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1. Go to *www.goodsearch.com*.
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At approximately 1¢ per search, if 500 WATER supporters searched *Goodsearch.com* just twice per day, WATER would earn $3,650 each year to help fund our work actualizing feminist religious values for social change.

In Honor of Her and Him

From Margaret D. Hutaff of Cambridge, MA: "In honor of **Megan Sullivan**, WATER Intern, Summer 2008."

From Martha Linn Scheel of Greenbelt, MA: In memory of her mother, **Margery Scheel**.

From Nancy Lee Head of Arlington, VA: In honor of **Jackie M. Smith**, "a feminist mentor for me."

From Richard Blanchfield of Oceanside, CA: In honor of **Marian Chu**.

From Louis and Stu Pearson of Glenville, NY: In honor of their daughter-in-law **Andrea Lachance**'s birthday.

From Virginia Anne Day of Southport, CT: In honor of the recent CTA presentation by **Diann Neu** and **Mary Hunt**.

From Mary Aquin O'Neill, RSM, of Baltimore, MD: In honor of **Mary Hunt** and **Diann Neu.**

From Carol and Joe Scinto of Rockville, MD: "In honor of **Rosemary Neave** of New Zealand for her great generosity of spirit, and in memory of her beloved partner, **Ngaire Brader**, whom we hold dear."

From Cheryl Nichols and Betty Bosmeyer of Hyattsville, MD: "In memory of **Deb** [LaFontaine] and in gratitude for the Hunt-Neu and Duffy extended family."

From WATER: In honor of **Torrence Thomas**, computer expert extraordinaire, in thanks for his excellent work.

From Judith Lhamon of Hamden, CT: Celebrating **Joanne Neel-Richard**'s and **Mary Anne Osborn**'s 25 years together and their marriage on December 31, 2008. Both are Episcopal priests and have been active in Love Makes A Family."

WATER's "Seasons Series" Meeting a Need

Diann L. Neu

Liz emailed WATER a challenge: "Thanks for your hugs and love from afar! Your challenge to name something you can do from a distance has given me an idea when I was catching up on some old *WATER-wheels*. . . I think there's a need to create a liturgy for going into chemotherapy and/or radiation, either a blessing ceremony for a person about to start radiation or chemo, or a shorter one to use during the actual infusion process. I think it would be used a lot especially by feminists who are in community with someone diagnosed—and that's getting more common day by day!!"

"Seasons of Survival: Rituals for Women with Breast Cancer," followed by "Seasons of Healing: Journaling and Resources," and now "Seasons of Compassion: Resources for Companions of Those Needing Healing" are WATER's responses to Liz's challenge.

These interfaith resources provide women with cancer, their families and communities the prayers, rituals, and resources they need to enhance their quality of life and empower them. We have talked with women with cancer by phone, email, and in groups to learn what they need. We have celebrated public rituals, especially during October for Breast Cancer Month. We have participated in Race for the Cure. We have given workshops at denominational conferences. We have mourned the passing of loved ones.

The women asked that these popular resources be created as prayer cards so that they could take one piece of paper with them to chemo rather than carry a heavy book. So they are beautiful colored prayer cards with lovely graphics for meditation.

We hope you can help advertise these much needed resources, and order several. Make sure that those who need them know about these special prayers.

Tell individuals, women's groups, cancer centers, health care providers, doctors, nurses, counselors, spiritual directors, Ministers, and members of religious Communities about the "Seasons Series."

Order Form

"Seasons of Compassion: Resources for Companions of Those Needing Healing"
54 different prayer cards focusing on healing for caresharers

"Seasons of Healing: Journaling and Resources"
39 different prayer cards focusing on journal writing for healing

"Seasons of Survival: Prayers and Rituals for Women with Cancer"
30 different prayer cards to aid healing

❒Send me ___ "Seasons of Compassion" @ $15 each + $2 shipping & handling, or 5 packets for $70 + $5 S&H = $_____.

❒Send me ___ "Seasons of Healing" @ $12 each + $2 shipping & handling, or 5 packets for $55 + $5 S&H = $_____.

❒Send me ___ "Seasons of Survival" @ $10 each + $2 shipping & handling, or 5 packets for $45 + $5 S&H = $_____.

TOTAL= $_____.

❒I am enclosing a check, made payable to WATER

❒ I am paying online by going to *www.hers.com/water*, (Click the "Donate" button at the top and then the orange "Donate" button).

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Laughter, Tea, and Goodness

Emily Derstine, Fall Intern

In this season of giving thanks, I have much for which I am grateful. As I reflected on what I am thankful for, it occurred to me that I have experienced all of these things and more through my semester-long internship at WATER: laughter, good conversation, community and relationships, health, warm tea, delicious food, meaningful work. I have been blessed in countless ways by interning at WATER. I have had so many wonderful experiences and memorable moments, and know I will look back on this semester as formative, transformative, undeniably great.

A semester spent at WATER would be difficult to describe in the length of a short book, let alone in a corner of a newsletter. Thinking back over the last few months at WATER, numerous highlights stand out in my mind: the energizing, invigorating, life-giving work of the WATER office; leaving the women's harvest ritual gathering feeling full of life, love, and gratitude, after a beautiful evening of sharing together as women, responding, and remembering those who have come before us; singing autumn carols in the office, with mugs of steaming mulled cider in hand; participating in yoga, with women whose ages span the generations, under the sure light of Sister Moon; sitting and talking, over tea, with women from the local Silver Spring neighborhood and from around the world; being empowered, supported, and encouraged each day in the work I do, respected for who I am, and treated as an equal and a valuable member of the WATER team; becoming impassioned and motivated anew by the strong sense of justice and confident sense of hope present at WATER.

I already know—and have known—that it will be hard to leave WATER. The relationships I have built and developed at and through WATER have been meaningful and life-giving; I will miss them greatly. But I also know that, with all of these memories and moments of insight and vivacity, of conversations over tea, the experience of this semester's internship will live on and will continue to impact my life, for days and years to come. Through the opportunity and privilege of interning at WATER, I have been richly blessed. My time spent at WATER is an experience for which I will always be thankful.

Events Recap

Top: (l. to r.) Gail Lambers and Louise Lears exchange stories of the Vatican at WATER's Solidari-Tea in Louise's honor.

Middle: WATER staff enjoy a luncheon together. (l. to r., seated) Hope Bauerlin, Emily Derstine; (l. to r., standing) Anna Roeschley, Jane Roeschley (visiting her daughter), Mary Hunt, and Diann Neu.

Bottom: (l. to r.) Rosemary Neave, a colleague from Auckland, New Zealand, and Carol Scinto, WATER editor emerita, share stories and smiles at WATER.

Resources

Alpert, Rebecca T. WHOSE TORAH? A CONCISE GUIDE TO PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM. New York: The New Press, 2008 (176 pages, $23.95).

A super smart overview of Judaism written from a feminist and LGBTQ friendly perspective. Rabbi Alpert makes the power analysis—who gets to decide what's the real thing—in a most persuasive and compelling way.

Compton, Madonna Sophia, Maria Compton Hernadez, and Patricia Campbell. WOMEN SAINTS: 365 DAILY READINGS. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006 (531 pages, $19.95).

Good information on the "saints" (all do not bear kyriarchal approval) even if the prayers are sometimes in gender exclusive language.

Cullinan, Colleen Carpenter. REDEEMING THE STORY: WOMEN, SUFFERING, AND CHRIST. New York, NY: Continuum, 2004 (164 pages, $19.95).

It is hard to say something new about suffering but this book succeeds in saying fairly traditional things with fresh resources from literature.

Denzey, Nicola. THE BONE GATHERERS: THE LOST WORLDS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WOMEN. Boston: Beacon Press, 2007 (290 pages, $27.95)

Shining a bright light on women from the fourth century raises a lot of useful questions about the roles women played in worship, hospitality, priesthood. An engaging story.

Dierks, Sheila Durkin and Bridget Mary Meehan, Editors. EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES, VOLUME ONE: THEMES AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS. Boulder, CO: WovenWord Press, 2008 (88 pages, $19).

These Eucharistic prayers are suitable for parish as well as community use. They are a gentle, progressive way to wean people from language and imagery that offends and introduce them to worship that invites, includes, enlivens.

Franklin, Anna. ROMANTIC GUIDE TO HANDFASTING: RITUALS, RECIPES, AND LORE. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004 (221 pages, $14.95).

No matter what kind of commitment you are planning, this book provides useful information, creative ideas, and encouragement. Who knew that "bridal" had to do with beer as in bride's ale?

Gonzalez, Michelle A. CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE: AN INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007 (210 pages, $20).

A basic approach to the common sources with a gender analysis. Good for classrooms and study groups.

Hamilton, Lisa B. WISDOM FROM THE MIDDLE AGES FOR MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN. NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2007 (240 pages, $17).

An engaging, almost chatty way into the thought of women whose middle age was considerably earlier (both in time and in years—they were probably in their late 20s if/when they hit middle age) than ours. Still, wisdom reigns.

Juschka, Darlene M., Editor. FEMINISM IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION: A READER. New York, NY: Continuum, 2001 (700 pages, $70).

How do feminism and the study of religion find their way together? With great complexity, as this anthology shows. Not for the casual reader, this compendium of some foundational texts is a reference work every library needs.

Lanzetta, Beverly J. RADICAL WISDOM: FEMINIST MYSTICAL THEOLOGY. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005 (262 pages, $22).

Mysticism without romance, spirituality without commodification. Ah, the welcome relief of it after so much fluff!

Love, Barbara J., Editor. FEMINISTS WHO CHANGED AMERICA 1963-1975. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006 (526 pages, $80).

A reference volume for every library, this collection of stories about the women who led the way in the Second Wave of feminism in the U.S. is a signal contribution. Some WATER colleagues are featured—Maureen Fiedler, Dolly Pomerleau, Donna Quinn, Judith Plaskow, Mary Daly, Mary E. Hunt, among many others.

Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J. IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS: CARING FOR CHILDREN AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007 (242 pages, $21.95).

One woman's take on raising children with an eye toward spirituality, or, perhaps being a spiritual person and also raising children. More feminist reflection would be welcome but this gets the ball rolling.

Osiek, Carolyn, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch. A WOMEN'S PLACE: HOUSE CHURCHES IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006 (345 pages, $20).

The tradition of hospitality has long been the purview of women. This is solid scholarly foundation for arguing the importance of women's roles in house churches.

Peters, Rebecca Todd. IN SEARCH OF THE GOOD LIFE: THE ETHICS OF GLOBALIZATION. New York, NY: Continuum, 2004 (228 pages, $24.95).

A good guide for current economic discussions that have an impact on the world even though everyone does not get to vote for those who lead it.

Preston-Pile, Cindy and Irene Woodward. TRAVELING WITH THE TURTLE: A SMALL GROUP PROCESS IN WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY AND PEACEMAKING. Oakland, CA: Pace e Bene Press, 2006 (283 pages, $25).

Feminist spirituality with an emphasis on non-violent social change and peacemaking is laid out in thirteen sessions. Lots of ideas here for exercises and group activities to elicit the best from the committed activist while giving her/him a lot in exchange.

Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa. CONFUCIANISM AND WOMEN: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006 (200 pages, $22.95).

Insights on Confucian feminism make this a useful reference. Such hybridity is normative in many communities.

Schaberg, Jane with Melanie Johnson-Debaufre. MARY MAGDALENE UNDERSTOOD. New York, NY: Continuum, 2006 (174 pages, $12.95).

Smart, accessible, well researched, this collaborative effort makes feminist scripture studies available to non-specialists. It is an invitation to explore a host of ways Mary Magdalene has been read and misread.

Sentilles, Sarah. A CHURCH OF HER OWN: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A WOMAN TAKES THE PULPIT. Orlando, FL: HarcourtBooks, 2008, (338 pages, $25).

This study looks at women who want to be ministers but face the hurdles of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination which still keep the leadership of mainline Christian churches white and male.

Shaw, Miranda. BUDDHIST GODDESSES OF INDIA. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006 (571 pages, $35).

Buddhist goddesses are not well known but now they have been given their due in a scholarly volume with marvelous pictures that bring them alive.

Skinner, Alice B., Editor. ROOTED IN SPIRIT: A HARVEST OF WOMEN'S WISDOM. West Chester, PA: Chrysalis Books, 1999 (210 pages, $18.95).

This Swedenborgian resource draws heavily on that tradition's mystical dimensions and spiritual lights. Stories of the community's women bring yet more voices to the feminist theological chorus.

Swedish, Margaret. LIVING BEYOND THE "END OF THE WORLD": A SPIRITUALITY OF HOPE. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008 (222 pages, $18).

The impasses of contemporary life require rigorous spiritual practices. Marge Swedish offers her insights on how to gird up our hope and move through the morass to a communal and joy-filled future.

Vigen, Aana Marie. WOMEN, ETHICS, AND INEQUALITY IN U.S. HEALTHCARE. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006 (272 pages, $69.95).

The arguments are persuasive and the case is made. Still, the changes are far from being implemented despite the dire needs so many face.

Wangila, Mary Nyangweso. FEMALE CIRCUMCISION: INTERPLAY OF RELIGION, CULTURE, AND GENDER IN KENYA. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007 (206 pages, $25).

This is a controversial topic requiring careful, respectful thinking which Kenyan theologian Mary Wangila provides. She concludes that the practice must end, but she handles the question with utmost care for the women who are the center of feminist concern.

water

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The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) is a unique educational center in the Washington, DC, area that focuses on feminist work in religion. Since our founding in 1983, WATER has built a growing network of colleagues around the world who bring feminist insights to religious practice in the service of social change. WATER has a national and international reputation for quality research, publications, conferences, and direct services related to feminist issues in religion. Through workshops, rituals, seminars, retreats, and classes designed to promote women as religious and moral agents, WATER staff help many women, men, and children actualize feminist religious values and bring about social change.
If you would like to subscribe for updates from the office and occasional news from colleagues in the field, send a message to *majordomo@hers.com* with the words "subscribe water-l" (that's water-hyphen-letter "l", NOT number 1) in the body of the message.

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~ Brigit's Blessing ~

Brigit's Day is February 1st

Go dtuga lasair, Brighde spreagadh duit,
Go dtuga crios, Brighde slanu duit,
Go dtga cruthaiocht Brighde sli duit.

May Brigit's flame give you inspiration,
May Brigit's girdle give you healing,
May Brigit's creativity guide your way.
~ Barbara Callan

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