Ecumenism Begins At Home

by Mary E. Hunt

New chapters in the history of ecumenism are being written by women all over the world although scant attention is being paid to this growing phenomenon of feminist ecumenism in the literature and practice of ecumenics. The field is usually defined by what mainline Christian denominations are doing in bi-lateral and multi-lateral efforts to respect one another's beliefs while at the same time granting their own positions a certain special status. What could be called ecumenics in a patriarchal setting is an effort to resolve a dilemma created by the very dynamics of patriarchal faiths themselves, namely, the impossible task of holding together the many and the one, the whole and the parts, while prioritizing one over others.

Feminism begins with the presumption of ecumenism, of connectedness from house to house.

Feminist ecumenism is building concrete bonds based on some quite different assumptions and ways of thinking. There are three major currents of religious feminism, all of which are ecumenical, though differently. For sake of clarity I limit my focus to the scene in the United States and to those international bodies to which U.S. women are attached. The three currents overlap, but for heuristic purposes they are: 1) feminists in established ecumenical circles attached to national or international bodies; 2) the women-church movement, a broad-based coalition of feminist base communities that has emerged from efforts to bring feminist values of equality and mutuality to mainline Christian denominations; and 3) the women's spirituality movement that encompasses a vast array of faith groups, from astrology to wicca, tarot to tai chi, made up of many women who have roots in mainstream traditions but who find spiritual nourishment beyond those.

Feminism begins with the presumption of ecumenism, of connectedness from house to house (oikos) throughout the world. It assumes rather than proves connectedness between humans, animals, the divine and the earth. Particularity is a welcome characteristic of all that is. Race, class, gender, age, sexual preference, national origin are particularities that impinge on ecumenism, on connectedness, that require careful attention as well as respect. A feminist approach takes these elements into account, analyzing each situation according to the power dynamics at play.

Ecumenical Establishment

The "ecumenical establishment," an umbrella term for those organizations, agencies and desks that find their support and constituencies in the mainline Christian churches, encompassing the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the World Student Christian Federation, the World YWCA, relies on strong feminist leaders. It was not always so. The patriarchal dimensions of Christianity kept women out of significant leadership roles until recent decades. To date, the World Council, for example, has not had a female General Secretary. It has, however, had strong feminist input, especially from recent co-presidents including Dr. Marga Buhrig, Dame Nita Barrow and the Rev. Lois Wilson, as well as from feminist staff members. The programs of the Sub-unit on Women in Church and Society, under the lead (continued on page 2)
Ecumenism...
(continued from page 1)

ership of such women as Madeleine Barot, Brigalia Bam, Barbey von Wartenberg and Anna Karin Hammer, and the Community Study of Women and Men in the Church under the direction of Constance F. Parvey, are giving contributions to lasting bonds among women in churches.

Women ecumenical leaders have used main-line churches and institutions to foster feminist ecumenism. They have provided occasions for women from various countries to share with one another their perspectives, thus avoiding the mistake of universalizing from particular experiences. Women from developing countries have used financial and technical resources to develop important local initiatives such as cooperatives, conferences and study groups. The full impact of these efforts will not be felt for years to come, but the investment in women is always an investment in future generations.

These leaders focus on women's specific needs within ecumenical circles. Child care, equal pay for equal work, and educational opportunities for women within all segments of the church are part of the notion that ecumenism and justice begin at home. Women's pre-assembly meetings are now normative at major ecumenical gatherings, an acknowledgement of the fact that such assemblies are usually structured in ways that do not reflect women's processes. At

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The praxis base owes its emphasis to the insistence of women whose survival is at stake. It is the starting point of what Afro-American women have come to name a "womanist" perspective that begins with the survival needs of women and their dependent children.

Denominational groups such as United Methodist Women, and interdenominational organizations such as Church Women United are collaborative efforts to deal with concrete needs as well as the faith needs of the whole church, more than half of which is female.

Collaborative work abounds. For example, several women ministers from different denominations in New York congregations invite their parishioners to joint bible studies. The ministers enjoy working together and the parishioners profit from their collaboration.

Women-Church Movement

The women-church movement is another font of feminist ecumenism. It was sparked in the United States by Catholic women who were scandalized by the refusal to ordain qualified female applicants, and by Protestant women who realized that ordination was but the beginning of women's religious agency. Women-church is not a new sect or denomination, rather a series of house-churches like the Latin American base communities and the early Christian model of worship taking place in the homes of its members.

Women-church is a global ecumenical move-

ment made up of local feminist base communities of justice-seeking friends who engage in sacrament and solidarity. It has grown in the past ten years as an ecumenical movement of women who are naming, claiming, deciding and presiding as church. Adherents range from an ordained Methodist woman minister who pastors a congregation called "Women-Church" in Korea, to a house-church in Switzerland; from Latin American women who struggle to name their faith experience, to a ten-year old group in Washington, D.C. that meets every other Sunday for dinner and worship.

Two important ecumenical characteristics distinguish women-church from the women in the churches. First, women-church pertains to no single denomination. It meets different needs for women from different denominations. For many Catholic women who find current Vatican trends troublesome, the choice is often women-church or no church. For many Protestant women, women-church is a horizon against
which to measure progress in their churches lest they be coopted by and incorporated into ecclesial structures that they have not designed.

Second, women-church models new ways of being church with sacrament taken in the most secular of senses and solidarity taken as sacred. At the "Women-Church: Claiming Our Power" conference in Cincinnati in 1987 the central theme was social change with workshops on violence, poverty and reproductive rights. Women kneaded the bread for their own eucharist, a reminder of the hands-on nature of religious commitment.

Women’s Spirituality Movement

A less likely source for ecumenical inspiration is what is broadly termed the women’s spirituality movement. It is unlikely because most of the women involved would wonder why ecumenism is necessary, so taking for granted the eclectically integrated nature of their move-

ment that it would seem rather elementary to ponder how they are part of a whole.

"Women's spirituality" encompasses a broad scope. Native American and other indigenous spiritual traditions are represented. Wicca, goddess and pagan experiences are part of the mix. Priestesses and witches, covens and collectives, tribes and solitaries, give voice to the deepest stirrings of the human spirit.

Ecumenism demands diversity whether we like it or not, and diversity is something that these women display. Gatherings of women's spirituality folk are colorful reminders of the many ways of the same spirit. Those engaged in yoga, meditation, reading crystals and the like, are part of, and not marginalized from, the same struggle to survive and make change that motivates other women. They, too, meet in one another’s homes and apartments. They worry about one another’s children and focus their spiritual as well as political energies on a more just future. They teach the broader ecumenical movement to embrace without prejudice that which is different.

Ecumenical Feminists

Ecumenical feminists recognize that we are neighbors on a small planet, our houses are literally connected in an increasingly polluted environment. We make humble acknowledgement that the world belongs to All and that we inhabit it together, momentarily, doing our individual and collective best to pass it on to our children with a clean ribbon around it. Ecumenical, house to house, connections help.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., co-director of WATER, is a feminist liberation theologian and ethicist.

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Many Thanks

WATER depends on its many volunteers and trainees. This year we had lots of people helping to dispatch the newsletter, update addresses on the computer, organize the resource center and encourage our fund raising efforts. All of them receive our gratitude. Some who are leaving merit our special thanks:

Nicole Gutrick and Alexandra Bise from the Live Experience Activities Program (LEAP), and Jean-Marc Votel and Josh Kulpa from the Pathways School used WATER as their on-the-job training. Good luck to all of them as they seek first-time employment.

Lucy Tatman heads to doctoral work in theology at Claremont Graduate School where her hours of organizing WATER bibliographic resources will stand her in good stead.

Laurel Buck came with LEAP and then continued as a volunteer computer operator. She will take her skills and sense of humor to a certification program in computer programming, their gain, our loss.

Each and every one of our volunteers makes an invaluable contribution to the organization. We are happy to contribute to their development as well, especially as non-profit organizations cooperate with rehabilitation services in empowering the workers of the future. More on our "In A Different Style" project shortly...

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Introduction
Many women and children are survivors of domestic violence, rape, date rape, marital rape, incest, sexual abuse. Many have received or are receiving the therapy/counseling they need to cope with this violence in their lives. Many seek a spiritual dimension of support and healing. We need to create rituals and liturgies of support and healing for survivors of abuse.

This ritual of healing can be used in its entirety or in parts. Use it as a guide to help you create the ritual you and others may need.

Instructions to Leaders
1. Gather candles, evergreen boughs, flowers, tree branches or shells, one for each person, and place them on an altar table in the center of the circle.
2. Bring instrumental music, taped or played by someone in the group, which invites reflection.
3. Invite four women to be storytellers.
4. Gather a large rock, pitcher, bowl of water, and towel and place them on the altar table.

Invitation to Gather
From city center and country corner, from business office and home, from different ethnic and class backgrounds, we gather for a ritual of healing. We as individuals have been hurt; we have been betrayed; we have been abused; we have been scared. We as a people have been hurt; we have been betrayed; we have been abused; we have been scared. What happens to one of us affects all of us. We need healing.

Let us be quiet with ourselves and image the healing we need now as we listen to instrumental music. (Play instrumental music and reflect in silence for a few minutes.)

We need healing. We are healers. Let us create a healing circle by saying: "I am (name). I need healing from... I am a healer."

Creating A Safe Place
Let us create a safe place where we can celebrate a ritual of healing that we need. Why do you need safe places? (pause) Please respond to each phrase with "We need safe places."
(Statistics from The Flyer, Winter 1990-91)
Because violence exists in the world, we need safe places.
Because women and children have been violated, we need...
Because in the U.S. a woman is battered every 15 seconds, we need...
Because a rape is committed every six minutes, we need...
Because one woman in four will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime, we need...
Because half the victims of sexual abuse are under age 11, we need...

Because one out of every seven married women is the victim of marital rape, we need...
Because 25% of college women experience rape or attempted rape, we need...

Why else do we need safe places? Tell us and we will respond with "we need safe places."

Reading: "Survivor" by Martha Pospson from Daughters of Sarah, July/Aug. 1987.
God i keep saying God i can't do it not this time the pain the pain sure you can honey she says you can I know you can but God I don't know this time the pain the pain can't be hidden honey I won't leave God says and wipes my brow and kisses me even though she didn't have to God I keep saying God I hurt and she says oh honey I know you do

To create a safe place here now let's take a candle, light it, and place it somewhere in the room. (Candles are powerful symbols for an evening ritual. Evergreen boughs are effective for daytime or winter. Use the symbol that is appropriate for your group.)

Blessing of Light (or symbol you choose)
Let us bless this light. Please say after me: Blessed are you, Holy One of Justice, (echo) for you empower us to enkindle flames of healing. (echo)
Let us warm our hands over this healing fire. (pause) Cup your hands over the flame and draw its healing energy to your eyes three times.

Chant: "And She Will Rise" by Dakota Butterfield from Fire Within by Libana, words adapted by Diann Neu
(To add a circle movement, stand in a circle, on first beat move right foot to side, and on second beat move left foot beside right foot. Repeat until chant ends.)

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Like Drops
by Diann Neu
The earth is a woman and she will heal (2x)
We will live in her (2x)
The earth is a woman and she will rise...
The earth is a woman, she will care for us...

Litany of Healing
We begin a litany of healing by saying together the words "in the beginning" and then listening for the response.
All: In the beginning...
L: There was only pain and anger.
All: In the beginning...
L: There was only denial and humiliation.
All: In the beginning...
L: There was only loneliness and destruction.
All: In the beginning...
L: What else was there. Tell us and we will listen.
All: In the beginning...

Strengthen us as we break silence and confront evil, as we support one another and cry out for justice. We ask this in the name of all women and children. Amen. Blessed Be. Let it be so.

Telling the Stories
Introduction: These are stories of women from the Theatre Group of Casa Sophia in Santiago, Chile. They are stories of women in every city, every country, every ethnic background and every class in the world. (Printed with permission.)

First Woman--Gina
It was Christmas Day. It was three days since Pedro was home. I was so frightened of him. I got some few pesos from a neighbor to celebrate the day with my kids.
I went out into the street. There were lots of people outside. There was a bar on the corner. Pedro was there.
He was with another woman. I was so frightened of him. I don't know where I got the strength. I went into the bar and said, "Pedro, let's go home."
He glared at me and without a word, left and began walking home.
We arrived at the house.
He closed the door. And bolted it, and... NO! PEDRO, NO! NO!...
of Water

Song Response: “The Rock Will Wear Away” by Holly Near and Meg Christian
Can we be like drops of water
falling on the stone,
splashing, breaking, dispersing in air?
Weaker than the stone by far. But be aware
that as time goes by, the rock will wear away,
And the water comes again.

Second Woman--Maria
He was always right,
Because he was the oldest.
Because he’s the man, my mother said.
I couldn’t go outside, I couldn’t play nor speak.
He could split my head open
And beat me black and blue
Because he was the oldest.
He was the man, my mother said.
I remember when I was twelve years old;
It was my First Communion Day.
I was standing at the gate
Giving a holy card to a friend. I got hit.
I looked behind me
And there stood my brother.
My white dress was blood-stained.
He could split my head open
Because he was the oldest.
Because he was the man, my mother said.

Song Response: Can we be like...

Third Woman--Sylvia
I was a very happy child until I was 6 years old.
Then one day my mother said,
“You’re sister’s getting married
and you have to go with her to Santiago.”
I was so small
that I went without saying a word.
My sister gave me a beautiful doll
with a long dress and hair. I could comb.
One day when I came home from school
Juan was alone.
Juan is my sister’s husband.
I was really frightened of him.
He always bothered me.
And gave me strange looks...
I was really scared when I went in to do my homework...
Suddenly...
He grabbed me from behind
And started taking my clothes off...
NO! NO! PLEASE! NO! NO! NO!
My hands were all filthy from him...
My mother came in.
Mommy, get me out of here
PLEASE! get me out of here, mommy...mommy...
I stayed in that house until I was 16 years old.

Song Response: Can we be like...

Fourth Woman--Margarita
I looked so beautiful that day in my white dress
and veil.
I had just turned 17 and was pregnant.
I was so happy and so much in love.
I remember how after the wedding party
I waited for him to come to me.
Hours passed.
I see him, parted out, standing in front of me.
He looked at me and said,
"From this day on I’m going to be miserable
because of you!”
I wept a lot that night
An many times since he has beaten me.
And I have wept.

Song Response: Can we be like...

Maria: Most of us have been punished since we were children.
Gina: Many of us raped by our husbands.
Silvia: Many of us violently punished by the authorities.
Maria: Many of us insulted and humiliated.
Margarita: Many of us subjected by society.
Gina: We all had the dream of building a home
without violence.
Maria: All of us suffer disillusionment.
Silvia: We are all working to remake our image
Margarita: …our couples
Sylvia: our lives.

Reflection

All of what we have named and more happens to women as individuals, and affects us as a community. We need healing. What is your story? How are you working to overcome this violence? Let us share with one another so that we may offer support.

Song Response: Can we be like...

The Stone Ritual
(The leader picks up the rock and shows it to those gathered.)
The stone ritual symbolizes a release from pain and renewal of loving, healing energy. As we sit in this circle together, let us relax and focus on the stone. (pause) Let us pass the stone around the circle. As you receive the stone, hold it, imagine that you are pouring your pain into it, and then pass the stone to the next person.

(When each person has filled the stone with her pain, the leader puts the stone in a bowl of water, washes it, and dries it with a towel.)
Let us pass the stone around the circle again.
This time when you receive it, hold it and fill it with loving energy. (When each person has filled the stone with loving energy, place it in the center of the circle)

released from pain and filled with loving energy. Please share what you would like to about this experience.

Litany of Healing
All: In the new beginning...
L: there is the support of community.
All: In the new beginning...
L: there is courage to speak truth to power.
All: In the new beginning...
L: there is the compassion of friendship.
All: In the new beginning...
L: what else is there? Tell us and we will support you.
All: In the new beginning....

Sending Forth
Let us go forth from this safe place filled with support for one another. When times are tough— and they will be— let us remember that this time we are not alone.
Let us go forth from this safe place committed to working to create a world where abuse is non-existent.
Let us go forth from this safe place remembering we are like drops of water... and the water comes again.

Song: “Blessing Song” by MariSilvestro from Circling Free
Bless you my sister...Bless you on your way,
You have roads to roam... before you’re home,
And winds to speak your name.
So go gently my sister... let courage be your song,
you have words to say... in your own way,
And stars to light your night....
And if ever you grow weary,
And your heart’s song has no refrain,
Just remember we’ll be waiting...
To raise you up again...And we’ll Bless you our sister...Bless you in our way,
And we’ll welcome home...
all the life you’ve known,
And softly speak your name.

Diann Neu, M. Div., STM, co-directs WATER and is a feminist liberation liturgist.

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Southern Exposure

by Carol Scinto

Travel brochures promise luxurious accommodations, lavish entertainment, haute cuisine, spectacular scenery. Not so, WATER. Its first group study tour to the Southern Cone in April modestly proposed "an empowering exchange of diverse experiences." As one of six (the only grandmother) accompanying Mary and Diann on this initial expansion of their annual "Women Crossing Worlds" exchange, I can attest that WATER-trekking to Chile, Uruguay and Argentina may change one's life, enlarge one's heart, expand one's lung power, replace one's natural reticence with unreserved huggings (and possibly lead to slight dyspepsia from an empanada too many). This visit to women's groups and human rights groups is WATER's living model of solidarity.

Spanish phrases, South American faces now crowd my dreams. Waking, I relive deeply etched memories:

In Chile, a powerful drama in a small room at the Casa Sophia, where women re-enact their own painful true stories of abuse, and audience and performers cry together; shining young girls in a crowded workshop/clinic/center in La Pincaya barrio, voicing their aspirations--to economic chaos--sharing their stories, struggles, hopes... In Argentina, marching with the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, then hearing face to face the personal stories, wrenching facts of their long search for their children, for accountability and justice; a crowded visit to the only (recently instituted) public service for battered women--a two-phone "hotline" (ringing constantly) on a small table in a noisy locker room at the main fire/rescue center, the long trip to outlying Villa Hidalgo, a destitute barrio where women are building, stone by stick by scrap, a place to gather, store, share, teach and renew their own strengths and abilities, and those of their families.

More faces, more vignettes flood my mind, more than I can tell. Common threads of each country include hospitable WATER friends who welcomed us into their lives as "amigas," and showed us their country through women's eyes. One central recurring vision needs underscoring: "Help us make known these truths, these problems, the violence," say the women we met in South America. "These are the truths, the violation of women everywhere."

"Help us make known these truths, these problems, the violence."

Correction: The ritual referred to in WATERwheel Volume 3, No. 4 that took place at the Fifth Encuentro of Latin American and Caribbean Feminists in San Bernardo, Argentina was planned by La Urdimbre de Aquehua, a women-church group in Argentina. Among the members involved with the planning were WATER staff person Sara Newbery, Dr. Zulema Palma and Lynn Fischer. WATER regrets any confusion caused by the error.

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Besides co-founders and co-directors Mary Hunt and Diann Neu, the WATER delegation included: Kathleen Erickson, RSM, former provincial, Omaha, NE; Irma Levesque, student at Union Theological Seminary, New York; Marie Therese Martin, CSI, former director of Worcester Connection; Sheila O'Brien, BVM, Spanish Professor at Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa; Beth Wheeler, WATER intern; and the abuela (grandmother), Carol Scinto.

Overflowing schedules and comfortable accommodations were arranged by our hostesses from each country. Thank you Peg Moran and Monica Hingston from Chile; Christina Grele from Uruguay; Mabel Filippini, Alicia D'Amico, and Sara Newbery from Argentina.

WATER uses and recommends Passport Executive Travel. Call Jay Ashton 1-800-344-7794 or 703-549-5559. She coordinated the travel.

Carol Scinto is WATER's Editorial Assistant. 
Recent Resources

Ways to celebrate the lives and stories of women in scripture; prayers aplenty for women's groups.

A controversial volume of 1990's feminism. Women's social and economic gains are still quite modest, but Wolf argues that we have made almost no progress away from the imperative to be slim, young and blond.

Especially For Children
Jeanne d'Arc has inspired many girls to "faith, endurance, courage and confidence" as the prayer goes. It is never too early for strong role models.

Another "true meaning of Christmas" story but well done and up to date about an immigrant family in California.

Audios
THE PIMSLEUR TAPES, both SPEAK AND READ ESSENTIAL SPANISH and SPEAK AND READ ESSENTIAL GERMAN. Language study takes time and discipline. An excellent tape system can help. These courses are first rate. Heinle and Heinle Enterprises, Inc., 29 Lexington Rd., Concord, MA 01742, (800) 628-2597 (16 cassettes, 32 lessons, $249.95).

What a combination! Sing, learn history, get in touch with the essence of life with wonderful artists. A treasure.

WATERwheel Spring 1991
Empowering Breakfast

Women in ministry in the greater Washington, D.C. area enjoy a monthly breakfast meeting at WATER. Consider this for your local group. It is a program idea whose time has come. Here are the ingredients:

**Breakfast** is simple and healthy. Plenty of fruit, wholesome muffins, juice, coffee, tea, and best of all, the women report, they don’t have to fix it themselves!

**Time** is a factor in busy women’s schedules so we begin promptly at 8 AM and end on the nose at 9:30 AM.

**Nourishment** comes in the form of introductions around the circle, a chance to catch up and raise concerns.

**Speakers** give 10-15 minutes of input with the remaining half hour for discussion. Recent speakers include Dr. Marga Buhlig and Dr. Else Kahler from Basel, Switzerland, on ecumenical feminism; Dr. Carroll Saussy from Wesley Seminary on goddesses; and The Rev. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell from Howard University School of Divinity on survival skills for women in ministry. **Taking time** to be together and get refreshed is empowering. We recommend it.

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to share with others

WATERwheel Summer 1991