



Top left: Diann L. Neu and Janet Walton at Trailblazers 2018 Conference, “Black Women and the Challenge of God Talk,” Union Theological Seminary in NYC. **Top middle left:** Hannah Dorfman (left) and Heuresse Kaj (right) in the WATER office. **Top middle right:** Water carrier from March 2018 WATERritual. **Right:** Mary E. Hunt (right) and Mary Yelenick (left) in NYC. **Bottom Middle:** Janaya Sachs (left) and Rachel Beaver (right) on a WATERtrip to the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. **Bottom left:** Sign from 2018 March for Our Lives.

Goodbye and Thank You to Heuresse Kaj and Rachel Beaver!

This Spring, WATER says goodbye to two beloved Staff Associates, Heuresse Kaj and Rachel Beaver.

Heuresse Kaj, Master of Divinity candidate at Wesley Theological Seminary, came to us through Wesley’s Practice in Mission and Ministry program. She brought a unique eye for liturgy and worship, helping to plan WATER’s monthly rituals. Her time at WATER culminated in a January 2018 ritual against human trafficking, an issue she became passionate about in her native Democratic Republic of Congo and through missionary work in Japan. Heuresse will continue in her second year of Practice in Mission and Ministry at Asbury United Methodist Church and focus on raising awareness of human trafficking.

Rachel Beaver, a recent graduate of Randolph College, joined us with a keen awareness of current social justice and theological issues. Her passion for feminist Biblical scholarship and early Christianity made her a welcome addition to our staff. Rachel assisted in projects related to WATERtalks, wrote many a book blurb for the Recommended Resources section of our website, helped organize WATER archives, and more. This fall, Rachel will be heading off to New York City to pursue a Master of Arts in Religious Studies at Union Theological Seminary.

A heartfelt thanks and congratulations to both Heuresse and Rachel. It is always hard to say goodbye to our staff, but we cannot wait to see what the two of you will do next! Come visit often.



Please stay in touch
8121 Georgia Avenue, Suite 310
Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA
301.589.2509
waterstaff@hers.com
www.waterwomensalliance.org

Who We Are

WATER is a global network, an educational and spiritual space, a center for dialogue on feminism, faith, and justice. We connect activists, religious leaders, students, scholars, and allies who are using feminist religious values to create social change. Founded in 1983 by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu, we have been empowering people worldwide to address structural violence for thirty-five years—making WATER one of the oldest feminist religious non-profit organizations in the world.

Join the WATER community as we work toward inclusive theologies and rituals, push for social change, and collaborate from different perspectives. To learn more about what we do, visit us at www.waterwomensalliance.org.

Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu: Co-directors | Hannah Dorfman, Janaya Sachs, Heuresse Kaj, Rachel Beaver: Staff Associates | Joe Scinto: Volunteer

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Center for Womanist Leadership—A New Locus of Strength

By Mary E. Hunt



Mary E. Hunt (left) and Katie Geneva Cannon (right) at Trailblazers 2018 Conference, “Beyond the Temple Door There is No Promised Land: Black Women and the Challenge of God Talk in the 21st Century,” Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

The Inaugural Gathering of the Center for Womanist Leadership, “Bearing Witness to Womanism: What Was, What Is, What Shall Be,” April 5-7, 2018 in Richmond, VA exuded strong, savvy, spiritual power. From the opening address by writer Alice Walker to the closing ritual when participants revered the elders, the gathering marked a signal contribution to women’s work in religion.

Diann and I were two of a handful of participants not of African descent who were fortunate to be present. When Dr.

Katie Cannon sends a personal “Save the date—Hope nothing will prevent you from being among the cloud of witnesses...” there is only one response—clear your calendar.

Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, is the Center’s driving force. Her vision for a place, both virtual and real, where womanist scholars, ministers, and activists can focus their energies is now realized with big plans ahead. Her scholarly work provides a strong foundation. She is held in the highest esteem by colleagues worldwide, her inimitable leadership key to the Center’s success to date.

Dr. Cannon pioneered womanism as a brave and bright graduate student at Union Theological Seminary where Dr. Delores S. Williams, whose presence was felt throughout the weekend though she could not attend, blazed the trail.

The gathering featured an all-star academic panel: Rev. Cecelia Armstrong, Rev. Dr. Emilie M. Townes, Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, Rev. Dr. Gay Byron, and Rev. Dr. Eboni Marshall Turman.

Womanist minsters—Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Episcopalian, or other—made up the majority of participants. Their stories revealed a brilliant quilt of lives dedicated to the service of their communities.

Womanist worship was suffused throughout the weekend. From the opening libations to the closing prayer, Dr. Melva Sampson kept a finger on the pulse of the group and offered worship accordingly. Dancers graced the center of the room, embodying prayer in myriad ways. *(continued on page 2)*

Congratulations, Mary, for the Heart Award!

Mary E. Hunt received the 2018 Heart Award from the Metropolitan Community Church in New York on March 31 at their Annual Easter Awards Banquet.

During her Holy Saturday Sermon, “Wishing You a Woke Easter,” she praised Rev. Pat Bumgardner for “thirty plus years of faithful, creative, may I say ‘woke,’ ministry in this church. You are widely respected for your leadership in the Global Justice Network of the MCC.”

Mary closed her sermon with a challenge: “Take home tonight a reignited fire in our spirits. Go home with reset energies in our souls to do the work of justice, to live woke. Let the alleluias resound and the joyous struggles continue. We are indeed ‘threatened with resurrection!’”

The text of Mary’s sermon can be found on WATER’s website, www.waterwomensalliance.org/wishing-you-a-woke-easter/



...Womanist Leadership
(continued from page 1)

Symbols and ritual actions made all of us feel included, responsible for the sacred space in which we found ourselves, and ready to take action following in the footsteps of those who went before us. Self-care was a common theme because the demands of ministry in a racist world are extraordinary. Women shared what keeps them going—running, meditation, music, singing, conversations with friends, and more.

The arts were much in evidence in a bustling marketplace of paintings, jewelry, books, even health advice to keep us all in the struggle longer and better.

A queer and queer-supportive group looked at “Black LGBTQ Love Leading Us to Liberation.” Mothers of lesbian daughters spoke of supporting their daughters. Gender non-conforming persons spoke candidly about their lives in black churches. Lesbians were forthcoming about their challenges.

This was a multi-generational meeting. Young women heard the stories of their foresisters. At the end, we all processed by and greeted Katie Cannon and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the grandmother of womanist theology from Ghana, (with an empty chair left for Delores Williams), and received a blessing from them. There was a distinct sense that this work is in good hands.

I went home not just inspired but committed. There was no glossing over the raw, bitter legacy of racism and its intensification during the current administration. Womanists have their work cut out for them. As they lead, others of us pledge our efforts to follow them to justice. All strength to them and all power to the Center for Womanist Leadership! ■

Mary E. Hunt is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)

Women-Church Convergence Supports Young Leaders Organizing Against Gun Violence

Women-Church Convergence held its 2018 Annual Meeting in Winsdor, Canada that strengthened our solidarity with Canadian colleagues.

Women-Church Convergence is a coalition of 31 autonomous Catholic-rooted groups working to build just social and ecclesial structures with shared power for everyone, especially women and those whom church and society marginalize.

Many member groups signed the following letter to support young people’s work against gun violence.

Dear Anti-Gun Violence Leaders,

We, religious feminists rooted in the Catholic tradition, greet, applaud, and join you in your efforts to eradicate gun violence. Your courageous and insightful leadership is making a big difference.

We are deeply impressed by you who remind us of our justice-seeking children in your call for non-violence, an end to false notions of masculinity, and the embrace of all diverse and unique members of our communities. We write to convey our gratitude and pledge our support.

Thank you for stepping up and speaking out against the epidemic of gun-related killings that has marked your lives already. Columbine, Pulse Night Club, Parkland, and Sandy Hook are constant and growing reminders that our country, that has almost as many guns as people, is in deep danger.

You are right to protest the fears you feel, the drills you endure, the suspicions you sense as you go to school and out to play. No children should have to experience any of that.

Your leadership is vital. We stand with you because the burden of social justice belongs to all of us.

Young people led the civil rights and anti-war movements. Many of us in our youth spearheaded women’s and LGBTIQ efforts. You do the same.

These commitments mature and endure. Still, it takes a whole society, from oldest to youngest, to make change. That is why we link our hearts and voices with yours.

We concur that automatic weapons and bump stocks have no place in a civilized country.

We support an end to concealed weapons and a start to stricter licensing procedures.

We are willing to discuss changes to the Second Amendment hoping that a robust conversation might save lives.

We join you in recognizing the particular vulnerability of communities of color to gun violence and in acknowledging and eradicating the underlying racism that causes it.

We are all in for a safer country and willing to participate in the myriad ways necessary to achieve it.

Thank you students and activists, thank you protesters and change agents. When Emma González led us in silence at the March 24, 2018 rally in Washington, D.C., she demonstrated the impact of fusing spiritual with political power.

Our faith commitment to encourage and enhance vibrant, joyous life for all is the opposite of a culture full of weapons, hatred, and callous disregard for others. We share your vision of a safe, peaceful society and we will collaborate with you to make it so. ■

WATER Program Highlights

You can find audio of programs and ritual scripts at www.waterwomensalliance.org. Register for upcoming events on our website or email waterstaff@hers.com. Join us at WATER or by phone.

WATERtalks



In January, **Liz Edman** presented on *Queer Virtue 101*, how queer readings of the Bible and Christianity add to the richness of the Christian faith.



In February, **Rima Vesely-Flad** talked about how blackness and racial purity have been constructed and the importance of building *Theological Responses to the US Penal System*.



In March, **Monique Moultrie** discussed her book *Passionate and Pious: Religious Media and Black Women's Sexuality*. She explored how televangelism has influenced black women's views of their sexuality and how to change that.

WATERrituals

Diann L. Neu, Heuresse Kaj, and WATER Staff brought us together in January for *Praying to End Human Trafficking*. Through prayer and reflection, we renounced this modern day slavery.

In the February ritual, *Womanist Wisdom* led by **Diann L. Neu and WATER Staff**, we learned from womanist thinkers who are on the forefront of struggles for liberation.

In March, **Diann L. Neu and WATERstaff** celebrated *Mary Magdalene and the Women Witnesses*. We reflected on women whose faith encourages us to work and witness for justice.



In January, **Mary E. Hunt** led us in a focused meditation using a centering tool in the form of *One Blueberry*.



Cheryl Nichols brought forth the power of a fountain inside the National Museum of African American History and Culture in her February mediation, *Let Justice Rain Down*.



Under the guidance of **Virginia Day**, in March we meditated on Lucille Clifton's poem *"blessing the boats."*

Upcoming WATERprograms

WATERmeditation
Monday, May 7 at 7:30 PM ET with **Melissa Feito**, "In Memory of Ursula K. LeGuin."

WATERtalk
Wednesday, May 9 at 1 PM ET with **Stephanie Buckhannon-Crowder**, "Motherhood, Mayhem, and Mindfulness."

WATERritual
Tuesday, May 22 at 7:30 PM ET with **Diann L. Neu and WATER Staff**, "All Shall Be Well: Celebrating Julian of Norwich."

WATERcounseling
Call for spiritual direction, psychotherapy, or clergy supervision with **Diann L. Neu**, at WATER or via Skype.



WATERritual: Move in Solidarity

By Diann L. Neu

Walkers, marchers, protesters, runners, wheelers, crawlers, cyclists, dancers, swayers, stilt walkers—travelers on the journey for justice—we move in solidarity with you.

Litany of Solidarity
Struggling to make new roads for just causes, *Response: We move in solidarity.*
Marching against gun violence after Parkland. *R:* Speaking against sexual violence with #MeToo, Time's Up. *R:* Questioning social media policy after stolen elections. *R:* Protesting "no more nuclear war" in Iran, Syria, North Korea, United States, everywhere. *R:* Shouting "no" to human trafficking and violence against women and girls. *R:* Rallying to support DACA and protect Dreamers. *R:* Working to prevent climate change and support the Paris Agreement. *R:* Advocating for women's rights, racial equity, health care reform, and democracy. *R:* Organizing, resisting, persisting. *R:*

Moving Chant: As I move, the universe moves.
As the universe moves, I move.
Before, behind, on every side, we move as one.

Reflection: How do you move in solidarity with justice travelers? Write, pray, or sing a moving chant.

Song: Siyahamba - We are Marching in the Light of God, South African Hymn, www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwHU3bmGSUo
We are *marching in the light of God, (4x)
We are *marching, (4x) We are *marching in the light of God.
*Dancing... *Praying... *Singing...

Prayer for Movers
Compassionate and merciful Divinity of many names, Allah, Yahweh, Holy One, Wisdom-Sophia, Goddess, God of All, Providence, Move with us on this journey for justice. Hold our hands. Guide our feet. Protect our bodies. Search our hearts. Keep us moving forward that justice may come, The Earth survive, and all may live joyfully. Amen. Blessed Be. Let It Be So.

How Do You Take Action?
Let us know how you move in solidarity and take action to make change. Email us at waterstaff@hers.com.

Thank You!

Thank you Genevieve P. O'Hara and Jeanne Audrey Powers for naming WATER in your estates. Thank you Mary Brewster for requesting that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to WATER. Thank you Carpenter Foundation for renewing your grant to WATER for three more years. Thank you WATERgems for giving a steady stream of support every month. Thank YOU for sharing your resources with the WATER community. You make a difference.

May You Rest in Peace!

We celebrate those in the WATER Alliance who have died. Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers, Claremont, CA; Margaret Mann, Honolulu, HI; Mary Brewster, Laurel, MD; Sister Louise Akers SC, Cincinnati, OH; Rev. Genevieve P. O'Hara, St. Louis, MO; Jeanne Nicholls, Wharton, NJ.

