Creating Hope We Carry On
By Mary E. Hunt

I never expected to see women and children tear-gassed at a U.S. border. I did not anticipate rising suicide rates and opioid overdoses related to despair in my own country. I could not have imagined a rerun of the Anita Hill- Clarence Thomas debacle in the persons of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh as the Supreme Court becomes increasingly conservative.

Who knew that deadly California wild fires would finally make climate change vivid for millions? Police brutality, driving while Black/Latina, food scarcity on college campuses are all concepts I have had to learn in adulthood. I avoid referring to the sitting president and adding to the partisan divide. It does not take a blue ribbon committee to conclude that times are tough for all but the wealthiest, whitest, most entitled. Where is the hope?

Many years ago, feminist songwriter Carolyn McDade captured the dynamic I need in her popular anthem “This Tough Span Web.” The whole song is lovely, powerful, inspiring. I find myself humming the chorus just to be able to watch the news and digest reports of increasingly toxic and incredible events: “This circle opening moves with deepened faith, our lives to birth a living dawn. As love renewed turns in our common way creating hope we carry on.”

It is easy to sing, but hard to operationalize in a society where deeply divergent values hold sway. Efforts to cross the aisle, enter into dialogue with people with whom one disagrees, see the world from another perspective while suffering mots often feel futile.

I saw hope in action at the 40th annual concert of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, DC, administered by WATER colleague Judy Bond. Muslim, Mormon, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Bahia community groups offered artistic expressions of faith in a large, welcoming synagogue. There is much to be said for a Democratic senator presenting a service award to a Republican counterpart (even if they are distant cousins in the Mormon line). Troubled times make such gestures powerful. Watching young Muslims, most in headscarves, sing “Stand By Me” was enough to make the hardest heart break open in hope. Mine did.

As if the world’s woes were not enough, the Roman Catholic Church is imploding due to sex abuse crimes and cover-ups. For Catholics, it is a bad season as we watch the institution flame out in parosyms of clericalism rooted in sexism, racism, and homophobia. Still, this human heart craves a reason to claim love triumphs as Swedish theologian Krister Stendahl insisted in his comments on the writings of Paul.

A delegation of religious leaders led by a rabbi heads to the southern border. A phalanx of pastoral counselors always transporte immigrants to their appointments, serve meals to homeless people, lobby legislators, and vote. Pushing back against both structural and personal injustices may be the surest sign of hope, the best we can do for now. I hope it is enough to get through these hard times.

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Economics and Feminist Liberation Theology
By Mary E. Hunt

For the 22nd year in a row, the Feminist Liberation Theologians’ Network gathered at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado for its working session.

“Economics—Global and Local Intertwined: A Feminist Liberation Theology Priority” was this year’s theme. Scholars/activists Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Church Divinity School of the Pacific offered challenging remarks to start discussion.

More than fifty participants from nine countries named their new economic priorities ranging from concerns about students’ food scarcity and rising student debt, to questions about neo-liberal capitalism shapes everything from the American political job market to privatization of formerly government-run agencies.

Cynthia underscored that global capitalism is a human invention that can be changed. She offered a “Feminist Liberation Ethical Framework for Building a New Economy” with emphasis on economics, ecology, and democracy. The stakes are high.

Participants discussed how the California fires are an example of how differently people with resources and those without cope with disasters. They referred to people in the room who deal with similar dilemmas daily on their state’s playing field. One person suggested the need to retire the abominable practice of moving priest predators to different parishes and did not report the abuse as crimes to legal authorities.

“Enough is more than enough!” Clerical privilege and episcopal rule by incompetent and sometimes criminal bishops, priests, and parish leaders must end.

We begin by calling for these concrete next steps with many more to follow:

• We expect Catholics worldwide to engage in a massive theological and structural overhaul of the church beginning with competent committees of well-trained lay people to lead the Catholic Church.

We demand that the Vatican remove all popes, cardinals, and bishops who reigned sexually abusive priests from their leadership positions, and ensure that future bishops have never facilitated abuse. Recognizing that this means virtually all bishops, we repeat our call for meaningful leadership to be assumed by competent laity.

• We invite religious leaders from other faith traditions and secular professionals, especially counselors, social workers, ministers, rabbis, imams, and psychotherapists to step forward and help support victims report abuse, and speak out to church leaders. Catholic leaders have proved themselves incompetent to do this. We need help from outside of Catholic circles.

• We ask educators, parents, guardians, and parish leaders to offer age-appropriate education on the prevention of sexual violence.

• We urge the Catholic laity to develop a process of public reconciliation, based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, where victims and survivors of abuse can speak out to church leaders with the goal of moving forward together while perpetrators have admitted guilt and shown a disposition of restorativejustice.

• We pledge our energies and resources not to cleaning up a mess that is not of our making, but to living new, democratic, egalitarian forms of church that are open to all.

Women-Church Convergence to Catholic Hierarchy: "No More Abuse!"

Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of 28 feminist groups rooted in the Catholic tradition, say to the Catholic hierarchy and leadership throughout the world, “No More Abuse!”

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...We are horrified and disgusted by the well-catalogued accounts of priest pedophilia, abuse of vulnerable adults, bishops forcing seminarians and other priests to engage in sex as a condition of employment, bishops covering up crimes, and the former nuncio’s depiction of fueling factions among clerical higher-ups. We are shocked that bishops continued the abominable practice of moving predator priests to different parishes and did not report the abuse as crimes to legal authorities.

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Women Crossing Worlds

From Mexico: Mari Carmen Serviente de Mariscal of Mexico City visited with local women in feminist studies and theology from Mexico. From Australia: Coralie Ling of Melbourne joined us at WATER for her annual Visiting Scholar week to catch up on the latest researches and her findings from her research visit to the American Academy of Religion (AAR) meeting in Denver.

From Switzerland: Elisabeth Aeberli and Gabrielle Ferrazzini of Lucerne, Switzerland during their annual biennial trip visit to the AAR, WATER, and this year the Interfaith Faith Concert presented by the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington.

Feminist Liberation Theologian Network (FLTN)
In November, the FLTN gathered in Denver, CO. See report on page 2, “Economics and Feminist Liberation Theology.”

WATERcounseling
Diann L. Neu does spiritual direction, psychotherapy, clergy supervision, and pastoral counseling at WATER for individuals, couples, and groups. Call 301.589.2209 to make an appointment.

Ritual: A New Year Blessing Cup By Diann L. Neu

Fill your favorite cup with a drink you enjoy! Centering
This is the season of endings and beginnings. Let the Spirit of Blessings surround me as I give thanks.

A Story of Three Cups
Once upon a time there were three cups. The first was empty, waiting, ready to receive whatever was poured into it. The second was filling with possibilities, pleasing the soul with anticipation. The third brimmed to overflowing, inviting the thirsty to receive its powers.

Look at Your Empty Cup
My cup, empty now, will soon be filled with drink. Blessed are You, Divine Providence, for the potential you offer.

Fill Your Cup with a Drink of Choice
In filling this cup I see the possibilities of the universe pouring through me.

Hold Your Brimming Cup
This brimming cup is full of refreshment and renewal. Blessed are You, Holy Wisdom, for your gifts of empowerment.

Begin to Drink
With this first sip I give thanks for liberating streams in my life. (Pause) With this second sip I respect the diverse blessings cupped by and to others. (Pause) With this third sip I offer the waters of life to a thirsty world. (Pause)

Reflection
Think of your cup of blessings for the New Year. Notice the beauty emanating from it – an empty space, a place for mystery, a possibility waiting to be filled, a hunger yearning to be satisfied, a brimming cup ready to share. What do I need in this cup? What do I accept from this cup? What will I give with this cup? Take time now to meditate, write in a journal, converse, dance, draw, or do something else that gives you a pleasant way to embody your own wisdom.

Closing
This is the season of endings and beginnings. Let the Spirit of Blessings surround me as I give thanks.

Take Action for a Blessing
Fill the empty cup of another by calling, sending a card or an email, having a conversation, or reaching out just because.

© 2018 Diann Neu is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), dneu@hers.com.