Spiritual Strength, Religious Renewal
By Mary E. Hunt

Generations will recount the fiery destruction of Notre-Dame de Paris, the famous French cathedral, on April 15, 2019. Like the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, the catastrophic fall of the spire witnessed by thousands along the Seine River and tens of millions around the globe stopped the western world in its tracks. Closer to home, three Black churches were torched in Louisiana recently, in an alleged hate crime. Those buildings, too, hold the prayers and hearts of many.

The horror of what at this writing is considered a freak accident in Paris underscores a kind of collective, if inexplicable, reverence for sacred space. While the 850-year-old Gothic church belongs to France and not to the Roman Catholic Church, it is acclaimed, indeed beloved, for more than its architectural merit. Notre-Dame is a sanctuary, a place where beautiful rose windows and flying buttresses that were added to shore up the edifice say “holy” to many visitors. It is not accidental that the name and focus of the church is a female religious figure, Mary, whose many incarnations remind of the various ways the Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, and other religious models appear in history.

Looking at people’s faces as the cathedral burned, and hearing countless stories of personal connections to this French treasure make clear that many people find spiritual strength in the collective energy that oozes from the portals. It is as if the prayers of one generation percolate and permeate, creating what developmental biology calls morphogenic fields. Whatever it is that attracts 13 million visitors a year, Notre-Dame is a sanctuary, a place sacred to many communities. Whether god or goddess worshippers, Christians and others who like the human yearning for such touchstones, something tangible in the midst of turbulent times in the world order, seems to explain the raw emotion many of us felt as we watched the fire destroy the wooden roof made from trees that were planted a thousand years ago. The yearning is not so much for permanence as for connection. That is what religions (L. religere) do; they tie and bind.

Religious practices change and the names of religious groups come and go. But the many iterations that make up the complicated history of Notre-Dame are a case study in religious renewal. They are layers upon layers of human suffering and hope. The stones that protected some of the building’s treasures, and the fire fighters who risked their lives to extract other objects form one bulwark against cultural extinction. That spirit is strong.

Good luck arguing that religion is a thing of the past. Tell that to the people who in the first twenty-four hours after the fire pledged hundreds of millions of Euros to rebuild Notre-Dame. Tell that to generations of black church parishioners. Most people are not motivated by any of the relatively small religious differences over which wars are fought and lands destroyed. Rather, they put their treasure where their hearts are: in the big religious idea that all of creation is connected, ongoing, and sacred.

Welcome to the 21st century. Notre-Dame. May you and your sister sanctuaries live forever.

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Notre-Dame’s three iconic rose windows made it through the fire intact. The roses crown the north, west, and south sides of the cathedral. They are one of the church’s most recognizable images.
In a lively discussion, Patricia celebrated.

Mother, why are you weeping?

O Wisdom of the West, you who are honored and thanked

Church gathering in Philadelphia.

Ratcliffe of Catholics for Choice at the Women-

Cooper of SEPAWOC, Mary Donnelly of Women

Front l to r: Mary E. Hunt of WATER, Carolyn
Kellogg of A Critical Mass, Mary Grace Crowley-
Koch of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, and Sister
Cooper of SEPAWOC, Mary Donnelly of Women
of Dignity. Back l to r: Ruth Steiner-Feoe of Greater
Cincinnati Women-Church, Marianne Duddy-Burke of
DignityUSA, Sara Hutchinson Batacliff of Catholics for
Choice at the Women-Church gathering in Philadelphia.

2019 WATER Program Highlights

You can find audio of programs, notes, and ritual scripts at www.waternewsalliance.org. Register for upcoming events on our website or email waterraevents@gmail.com. Join us at WATER or by phone.

WATERtalks

In January, Nancy Wilson, retired Moderator of the Metropolitan Community Churches, was the first to Tell the Story. She discussed her experiences of pastoring on the margins as an open lesbian at the intersection of many communities and issues.

In February, Patricia Beattie Jung presented an overview of her book Sex on Earth as it is in Heaven. In a lively discussion, Patricia reconstructed a theological foundation for the claim that there will be sex in heaven and what that might look like.

In March, Gay L. Byron focused her presentation on her work Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse, co-edited with Vanessa Lovelace. She highlighted essays within the book which covered topics ranging from gender and sexuality to biblical children and childhood.

WATERrituals

In the January ritual, A Cup of Blessings for the New Year, Diann L. Neu, Emily Neufeld, and the WATER community celebrated the season of endings and beginnings. Together the group contemplated what each of them hopes to Do To Tell the Story. They shared their wisdom with, and how to share their own fresh realization and renewal.

For the February ritual, Feminist Wisdom for Peace and Healing, Diann, Emily, and the WATER community gathered to retell stories of women’s wisdom that have been represented in many mythologies through serpent imagery.

In the March ritual, Celebrate National Women’s History Month, Diann, Emily, and the WATER community honored and thanked women locally, nationally, and internationally for sharing their unique gifts with the world.

WATERmeditations

In January, Mary E. Day led a reflection titled Epiphany, sharing the poem “Watching the Ancestral Prayers of Venerable Others” by Pat Harmin Regalado.

In February, Cynthia Toolie led the circle focusing on Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom.

In March, Mary E. Hunt shared the poem “Prayer” by Mary Oliver as a stepping stone to communal meditation and as an act of gratitude for Mary Oliver’s life.

WATERcounseling

Diann L. Neu does spiritual direction, psychotherapy, clergy supervision, and pastoral counseling at WATER for individuals, couples, and groups. Call 301-589-2509 to make an appointment.

In the News

“Rome Has Spoken and Rome Is Finished: The Vatican’s Sexual Abuse Summit ‘Failed Miserably’” in Religion Dispatches by Mary E. Hunt, February 27, 2019.

“As UN Considers Status of Women, It’s Time for the Vatican to Take Its Rightful Place” in Religion Dispatches by Mary E. Hunt, March 13, 2019.

Ritual: Listen to Cries for Justice

By Diann L. Neu

People. Earth. animals. plants. water. air. fire. the universe - all are crying for justice.

Invocation of the Spirits

Light a candle. O Wisdom of the South, you who are Fire. Warm our hurting spirits and open us to stand with all who are crying. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Sound chimes. O Wisdom of the East, you who are Air. Empower us with your rising sun to breathe in and out again. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Put compost into a pot. O Wisdom of the North, you who are Earth. Strengthen us to move beyond what is cold and hard in life. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Pour water into a bowl. O Wisdom of the West, you who are Water. Refresh us with waterfalls to heal the hurts. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Lamentations for Justice

Question: Brother, why are you weeping?

Lament 1: I am an immigrant mother threatened with deportation and losing my children.

Response: Mother, we see your tears and stand with you.

Question: Sister, why are you weeping?

Lament 2: I am a survivor of clerical sexual abuse.

Response: Brother, we see your tears and stand with you.

Question: Brother, why are you weeping?

Lament 3: My child died in the war.

Response: Sister, we see your tears and stand with you.

Continue with the Question, Lament, and Response format.

Lament 4: My friend is experiencing homelessness.

Lament 5: I am living with cancer.

Lament 6: My sister is a survivor of human trafficking.

Lament 7: My friend is a survivor of domestic violence.

Blessing with Water

All who cry, come to the water. Get your hands wet, and bless yourself, especially your eyes, with this Source of Life.

Sending Forth

May we listen and take action when we notice injustice. May all who are hurting be healed. Amen. Let It Be So.

Take Action

- Comfort someone who is weeping by calling them, sending them a card, or taking them out for tea.

- Call your Congressperson and tell them to support a particular justice issue.

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