Support The WATER Internship Program! Join Us!

Through this program, Mary and Danni have mentored over 85 interns. This summer WATER welcomed three new interns Kali Lo-Ng, Kennedy Thedford, and Claire Coker (pictured above). With your support, the interns have had the opportunity to have experiences that will shine a light on their future endeavors and go beyond their time at WATER.

Here are three takeaways from the 2019 summer interns:

1. They attended museum talks, documentary premieres, and marched for Pride in DC.
2. They immersed themselves in feminist theological literature, and wrote book reviews.
3. They conversed daily about current events, feminist history, and networks of social justice workers.

Thank you for supporting the WATER internship program. These women are developing themselves as scholars, leaders, and social justice seekers, inspired by the brilliant women who ventured before them.

WATER internships for Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 applications are open now on our website. Join us!

Who We Are

WATER is a global, interreligious 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 and religious change. Founded in 1983 by Mary E. Hunt and Danni L. Neu, we have been empowering people to address structural violence for over 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 and religious change, and collaborate from inclusive perspectives. To learn more about what we do, visit us at www.waterrawomensalliance.org.

Mary E. Hunt, Danni L. Neu: Co-directors | Emily Neufeld: Staff Associate | Kali Lo-Ng: Kennedy Thedford, Claire Coker: Interns | Joe Scinto: Volunteer

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Cuba Reflections
By Cindy Lapp

Growing up in the Mennonite church, I recall stories from missionaries about people in other countries who combined their indigenous religion with new Christian beliefs and practices. It was labeled syncretism, and described as a very bad thing indeed. In order to be faithful, we were to call people to turn their backs to culture and tradition and embrace Jesus wholeheartedly. WATER’s latest delegation to Cuba gave me an opportunity to revise and renew my understandings of syncretism as well as see the power of women defining religion for themselves.

Theologian Clara Luz Afo often speaks about her congregation in Cuba: an Episcopal church that is primarily Afro-Cuban women (and three men) that celebrate Mass on Sundays and practice Santeria in their homes. On the May trip to Cuba we had an opportunity to visit the church with Clara Luz and the women as our guides.

Arriving in Limonar at 11am on a Thursday morning, the dusty streets were not busy except for a few horse drawn carts that act as taxis, people on motorcycles, and pedestrians. By noon the streets were filled with uniformed school children heading home for lunch. The historic if tiny Anglican church reminds us that the church is people not buildings. Most of the building was destroyed over the years with only a portion of the roof remaining. This church of older women does not have a lot of institutional support but they understand their purpose, so they are rebuilding as they have funds. There is currently one room, used for Mass, meetings and morning gatherings, and a restroom. The sanctuary is well underway - four walls awaiting a roof. There are also the outlines of a kitchen and a room for craft work.

Two women of the church came to the building to meet us that Thursday morning. They told us about their life together as a congregation. We saw the obvious dedication of the women and the strength that they have as a community. They shared with us the importance that the church and spirituality have in their lives. Besides meeting on Sunday for Mass, any who can gather each morning at 9 am to check in and offer support to each other.

The women talked about syncretism without apology - and they were clear that the Eucharist table is at church and Santeria altars are at home. They explained that in order to be integrated into Santeria, one must first be baptized into the church. Each of the Orishas in Santeria has a counterpart in the saints of Christianity. We saw that the two traditions are not at odds but fit together to create meaning, support, healing, and hope for the women who gather. After looking around the church, we were invited to walk several blocks to the Santeria altar the women have created in their homes.

What a privilege to catch a glimpse of these altars created with devotion and faithfulness. The colorful fabrics, beads, and altar items started in a corner and expanded across the room. In one home the altar was situated in the center of the room with a picture of the Last Supper on one end and a crucifix on the other. There was no explanation nor did it seem there was any contradiction. Here were the visible symbols of a lived faith. Women have always had to find a way to make meaning when things look dim and drear. These Cuban women have preserved, developed, and enhanced religious traditions that give them life, pull them together, and help them keep on. If you would like to contribute to help with the rebuilding of the church, please contact WATER. ●

Cynthia Lapp is pastor of Hyattsville, MD Mennonite Church and former WATER intern and staff associate.

Spring WATER Program Highlights
You can find audio of programs, notes, and ritual scripts at www.waternowsonline.org. Register for upcoming events on our website or email waterstaff@phs.com. Join us at WATER or by phone.

WATERTalks
In April, Rev. M Barclay and Mary E. Hunt, discussed what happens to people when churches like the Catholic and the Methodist undergo significant changes brought about by oppression. Rev. M Barclay is a provisional deacon in The United Methodist Church and Mary E. Hunt is a Catholic feminist theologian.


WATERRituals
In the April ritual, Listen to the Cries for Justice, Diann L. Neu and the WATER Staff listened to why many people are weeping for justice. In the midst of Holy Week the group contemplated how to create communities of struggle that address the injustices that cause us to weep.

For the May ritual, You Are the Salt of the Earth, Diann and the WATER Staff gathered to explore the healing properties of salt. We blessed ourselves and Earth with salt water.

In the June ritual, Pride and Equality Month: Grateful, Proud, and Connected. Diann and the WATER Staff celebrated the impact that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer people and allies continue to have on culture and history.

WATERmeditations
In April, Kate Stoltzfus led a reflection entitled Spring Cleaning, making room for springtime renewal and reflection.

In May, Cheryl Nichols led the circle in a meditation entitled Setting it All on the Table. The Ministry of Accompaniment is the time to contemplate the lives of those at the U.S.-Mexico border and our role in accompanying them.

In June, Emily Neufeld shared the poem “When I Am Among the Trees” by Mary Oliver as a stepping stone to communal reflection on how trees can impact our lives physically, mentally, and spiritually.

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


Ritual: Bless Me with Creative Hope
By Diann L. Neu

Many are weary from illness, inequality, abuse, loss, war, and injustices of all forms. They yearn for signs of creative hope. This ritual invites you to think hopefully about the future and make your visions concrete. You can share it with your family, community, or other group of friends at the beginning of a holiday meal or special time of sharing.

Centering Prayer
Light a candle.

God of Many Names,
Yahweh, Allah, Holy One, Divine Wisdom.
Bless me with creative hope for my weary journey.
Bless people in every nation with mercy, love, and justice.

Listen to Hope
“Hope is a song in a weary throat.”
— Paul Murray, Little poem, Dark Testament, 1970

“Hope is a very unruly emotion.”

“Hope is the thing with feathers | That perches in the soul | And sings the tune without the words | And stops at last on all.”
— Emily Dickinson, 1861, in T.W. Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, eds. Poems by Emily Dickinson. (1861)

Reflect | Meditate | Journal

What are my sources of hope? What are my hopes and dreams for the future? What creative action will I do in bring creative hope to my weary journey and a weary world?

Closing Prayer
God of Many Names,
Yahweh, Allah, Holy One, Divine Wisdom.
Thank you for your promise of hope.
Empower me to be helpful as I act justly, love tenderly, and walk with you.

Take Action
— Listen to the story of someone who is different than you.
— Find your hope, hold on to it, and share it.

© 2019 Diann Neu is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), dianneufeld.com.

Photo: Cuban Mariposa flower.