

waterwheel

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

The Editors Speak

The first issue of the WATERwheel delighted readers. Your responses hearten us and convince us that we need this vehicle to communicate with friends far and wide.

Several readers said that it had been some time since they had read a newsletter cover to cover. Others found the last two pages—the liturgy and the resources—something that they clipped, copied and passed on to friends. The AIDS article drew raves for the concise feminist approach to a tough moral issue.

The name, WATERwheel, drew cheers. It works. We get energy from you and recycle it back in the form of articles, bibliography, liturgy suggestions and news. You spread the word, the movement grows and there is more energy to share.

This time we feature Marga Buhrig's speech at the recent Women Church meeting in Switzerland. Carol Scinto adds her wit and wisdom on working at WATER. The liturgy and resources reflect summer—the need to relax and renew as we prepare for another busy year ahead.

Mary E. Hunt's response to the U.S. Catholic Bishops' first draft of a pastoral letter on women's concerns keeps that conversation going. Note, too, WATER's strong support for pro-choice Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey whose religious community decided not to dismiss them despite alleged Vatican pressure.

These are challenging times for religious feminists, so stay tuned and send us your comments. Happy reading, restful summer.

P.S. If you are sponsoring or attending a conference, workshop, lecture series or study group and can pass on WATER materials, please contact us at 301/ 589-2509.

Limited Partners

by Mary E. Hunt

The release of the first draft of the U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops' (USCC) "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption, A Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns for Church and Society" marks a new moment in the struggle for equality. Previously there was precious little evidence of the bishops' awareness of the giant steps which have been made by women in feminist theology, ethics and ritual. Now at least we can say that the bishops have heard some of our concerns. Their choice not to respond to them in the fullness of the Gospel call to be a "discipleship of equals" only becomes more obvious.

The draft is a baby-step forward, an effort to synthesize rather random data and to use it to lay out a "balanced" view. The document is structured in four parts: "Partners in Personhood, ...in Relationships, ...in Society and ...in the Church." In each section, the voices of the

Catholic Church is an adult. The document was written under such strictures—within the *a priori* limits of the Vatican—that there are no surprises. To the contrary, there are so many internal contradictions to their much lauded declaration, "Sexism is a sin," that one wonders whether it would be wise to sign on the dotted line of such a partnership. Let me be specific.

The insight that sexism is a sin has not penetrated very deeply into the episcopal consciousness. It is difficult to imagine the bishops writing on racism or on economic injustice, pronouncing both a sin, and then saying with impunity that no person of color and no one whose income falls below the poverty line could be an ordained priest in the church. Apparently sexism of that sort is only a venial sin.

To those who say that ordination will come eventually, and that this document paves the way, I suggest a careful reading of the text. First,

The insight that sexism is a sin has not penetrated very deeply.

satisfied and the alienated are heard, followed by the resources from the ecclesial tradition, and then the bishops' response. The overall impression is of a very elementary text, one which reflects levels of discussion held 20 years ago on issues of discrimination against women. You crawl before you walk.

The bishops originally intended to write a pastoral letter on women, but backed off when they were told not to write as if women were "the problem." What the bishops neglect to mention is that it was suggested that they write with women, modeling in the very process the partnership they seek. They rejected this option, stating that such a letter would not be a pastoral since pastorals can only be written by bishops. Instead, they developed the draft with the assistance of a staff person, a writer and five women consultants. (The sixth, Anne Carr, resigned with help when it was revealed that she had signed the New York Times ad, "Catholic Statement of Pluralism and Abortion.")

The draft may be a baby step, but the Roman

the bishops reiterate the offensive and outmoded notion of "natural resemblance." (Hence, women cannot be ordained because we could not preside at the eucharist as "a sacramental sign in and through which the presence of Christ, who was and remains a man, is shown forth." USCC draft note 141). Secondly, they so craft their call for further study that it reads as if by study we would see the church's "consistent practice," otherwise known as discrimination, in "the proper light." So much for partners you can rely on.

Likewise, in the section on diaconate, the bishops say the question has not yet been resolved because it has not been considered in Rome. The call for "thorough investigation" is linked to the fact that women are doing virtually all of the pastoral work that deacons do. A shortage of workers in the vineyard is upon us, making a solution to the lack of ministers a practical priority. This is how theology often changes, by the pressing needs of the church

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WATER is an educational center, an alliance of justice-seeking people that began in 1983 as a response to the need for serious theological, ethical and liturgical development for and by women. We work locally, nationally and internationally on programs, projects, publications, workshops, retreats, conferences and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be part of an inclusive church.

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Limited...

(continued from page 1)

running counter to deeply held beliefs. Why not say so and rejoice in the work of the Holy Spirit?

Note, however, that the issue at hand is "permanent diaconate." Somehow in the rush to keep the priesthood pure there is a convenient forgetting of the history whereas minor orders like lector and acolyte followed one upon the other right to the episcopacy. A call to allow altar girls, a so-called lay ministry, only "raises concern" in this document. It does not occasion a clarion call from the bishops to right the situation immediately with steps for eradicating such ecclesial sexism in each diocese. Such gutsy stuff is saved for nuclear war.

The style of the letter raises the specter of sexism. While some may argue that it mirrors the feminist focus on experience, I would contend that it trivializes women's experience by simply reporting selectively without spelling out criteria for evaluation. The voices of affirmation read like a novel in parts since the characters test credulity. In the absence of a rig-

problem facing the church in our time.

The bishops are at their best as they move further from the church door. The section on "Partners in Society" reflects Catholic social teachings about equality, finally bringing it up to date with women's economic reality. This is a strength of American Catholicism and it shows. The call for child support, health care, parental leave, comparable worth and condemnation of violence against women are heartening. If only the bishops had carried this concern throughout the pastoral, especially when the focus shifts from society to church.

The bishops are at their worst when they try to sort out the morass the church has created on sexuality. I would like to meet some of the "many women" who praised the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, since reliable studies show that a minuscule percentage of Catholic women adhere to its teachings. Likewise, I found it disconcerting to read about the joys of natural family planning in the same language used by scholars of domestic violence to describe the "honeymoon" period which follows a violent act (par. 56).

We will surely be asked, "What do Catholic women want?" The answer is justice.

orous social scientific methodology there is no way to assess the anecdotes. Even the voices of alienation trail off at points, as if it were enough simply to hear them and throw up one's hands.

Missing is the rigor of the pastorals on nuclear war and economics, as if women's experiences were warm and fuzzy rather than explicit, complex and sometimes contradictory. A glance at the first drafts on the other themes reveals a reliance on social scientific materials, expert testimony, the latest books in the field, and the nuances of arguments that well intentioned, if opposing, persons presented.

On women's concerns the bishops seem content to quote church documents (over 100 of 162 footnotes refer to church documents), conveniently passing over the serious, sustained scholarly work of feminist theologians.

Unbelievably, leading Catholic feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether is nowhere mentioned. The landmark work, *In Memory of Her*, by outstanding Catholic feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, is buried in a footnote, and her coinage, "discipleship of equals," is incorporated in the text without attribution as if the bishops had thought of it themselves. Would they have left out Karl Rahner and lifted so liberally if male theologians were at hand? When will they write their pastoral response to men's concerns, or is that what they have been about all these years? Such slights add up to a rather thin piece of work for what many consider to be the major

Abortion is left aside as an unspeakable issue, as if no Catholics disagreed on it. This tactic avoids the wrath of both sides on the issue. But it further weakens the pastoral's claim to be an adequate "response" to Catholic women's concerns even though it may be better than an endless rehearsal of what everyone knows about abortion.

Moreover, when the bishops take on the question of birth control they admit that "a majority of women believe that the church's teachings on birth regulation have been presented unconvincingly and are unrealistic in view of the experience of married Catholics." (par. 74). So far so good. But then, they blame the problem on theologians and priests who have confused those who practice birth control with how seriously they should heed the church's message.

Instead of admitting that there is an honest disagreement, the bishops posit the following *non sequitur*: "Hence women request clarification concerning the balance between the church's official statements..." and one's own conscience. They totally misstate the problem at hand. We have a teaching which no one follows. Foisting the blame on those who have tried to be pastorally helpful rather than acknowledging the limitation of the teaching will not cure the ill.

The pattern is repeated in the section on annulment, as if a competent explanation was all that stands in the way of persons experiencing

that difficult process as humane. The lesson to be learned is that private solutions to public problems simply do not work in an authoritarian church.

They persist in the distinctions between women in religious congregations, whom they continue to insist have "a covenant of spousal love," and other women. And they give a certain priority to so-called "women religious" in future collaborative work (par. 227). Divide and conquer by any other name is still effective.

The bishops urge chastity/celebrity on lesbian women, and they underscore the new-found resources of so-called single people. Of course, they never allude to the fact that some of those are heterosexually single but homosexually coupled. They perpetuate the myth that somehow women who are married and/or mothers have less time for ministry and theological pursuits, a myth that has been put to rest some time ago by the women, including mothers, who do outstanding work.

The final section on Mariology [the study of Mary] gives me pause. Are there really no other role models? Not that a liberation Mariology isn't helpful, but aren't there some other women in our own time and in our history who gave witness to a faith in love and justice without extra special "gifts"? I always choke on the word "gifts" in this context as if women were wrapping our hard won skills, degrees and choices in pastel boxes with large bows to put before the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is not just gifts that women bring which can be refused or exchanged because they are the wrong shape. Women bring talent, training, work experience and an offer to be part of a community on women's terms, as full partners.

Private solutions to public problems simply do not work in an authoritarian church.

No concrete plans are stated for implementation. How will the best of the pastoral be incorporated into the daily life of Catholics? Who will do further study? We don't even see the hint of developing an office of women's concerns in every diocese, a watchdog committee to monitor implementation, nor strategies for breaking the hegemony of the bishops-only decision-making of the national church. Until each bishop sits at the conference table with a woman of equal rank from the diocese, this letter will remain a kind of novel.

If earlier pastoral processes are any indication, the bishops will simply fine-tune this letter, not overhaul it. No solid opposition has spoken, nor have any progressive bishops called it too little and too late. They may have put their entire political agenda out in the open in their reactions to the recent USCC's administrative board's letter on AIDS which men-

tioned condoms. Or, perhaps they perceive that women's concerns are irrelevant.

I wonder if they will simply ignore the letter or hug it to death; both strategies could effectively neutralize progressives. Though debate will probably take us some steps back, quick passage may mean that this pastoral will simply gather dust. How bishops posture will be an indicator of how seriously they take it.

In the meantime, progressive feminists are left to ponder. If we criticize it on any but the most superficial grounds we are seen as ungrateful, unable to take a pastoral response into our hearts and let justice come later. Or, if we accept it with minor revisions we are participating in a process which denies the substantive structural changes which are necessary for real, or in legal terms, general partnership where everything is split down the middle, rather than limited partnership where some are not bound by all of the obligations.

We will surely be asked, "What do Catholic women want?" The answer is justice. We want a fifty-fifty deal, assets and liabilities alike. We do not want the counter-cultural approach of the church which protects women without the equally counter-cultural approach which has women name our own reality. We do not want the largess of the bishops for a few women deacons who will solve their priest shortage by their boundless energy and ministerial skill, unless the episcopacy is open to women.

Most significantly, we do not want more letters written in such a way as to reduce our considerable intellectual, political and spiritual efforts toward equality in church and society to footnotes on papal pronouncements. A good next step would be to use this draft as a back-

ground piece and to set up structures to implement its ideas. These include serious study of feminist work by all members of the church.

Down the road, a letter could be issued, a substantial document this time, one that will incorporate the *Sophia* of women-church and reflect the many ways that faithful women are living beyond unequal partnerships. It would be co-authored by female and male authorities, and it would include reflection on equality from lived experience in church and society. No such document is possible yet, so better to hold the pens.

Feminist theologian Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., is co-director of WATER. This article appeared in Conscience Vol. IX, No. 3, May/June 1988.

For copies of the bishops' text contact Women's Ordination Conference, P.O. Box 2693, Fairfax, VA 22031, 703/352-1006.



The WATER Log

by Carol Scinto
(older element at H2O)

(Editor's note: This account is rendered by our senior volunteer who spends her Wednesdays wisely. It gives a glimpse from inside the fishbowl and was originally titled "Flushed with Success". Is there any end to the WATER puns?)

Just another Wednesday at the WATER office...Arrive at commodious suite over sandwich shop in Silver Spring (can't be confused with Watergate complex). Find Mary, alabaster brow beaded with feminist yet ladylike sweat, whipping out theological tsunami. Salty insights seethe, wisdom crests. Diann, trailing vine leaves and sweet harmony, rises Venus-like from sea of paperwork. Laura crouches coolly at computer, forging new electronic bonds of friends' names, addresses.

Mail pours in. Many messages, heartening donations from wonderful people (you!) responding to first WATERwheel: "On with the flow!" Fondly recall recent weeks of hard labor, toting 'Wheel's tonnage from trunk of Hoosiermobile (Diann's car) up 10,000 stairs to label, staple, zip sort, stack, then trek to post office. My aged limbs still taut as fiddle strings.

Phones ring. Mary fields call from columnist seeking quick fix on women in religion (25 words or less). Diann intones long-distance mantra with legal/fiscal guru Terry in NJ, encodes latest advisory (WordPerfect 5.0, whatever that is) from computer savant Jessica. Phones ring: publishers, pundits, protagonists, antagonists, friends, the world.

Office nag (me) insists on lunch break. Motherly habit, plus starvation. Ah. Now total immersion in weekly infusion of pulse-pound-ing publications--e.g. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Conscience, New Women/New Church, The Witness, NCR, ISIS, The Wanderer (Wanderer?), Femmes et Hommes, Mujer and other assorted Latin Americana.

Banter abounds; ideas burst in air. Tish twirls in, energizes all, posts additional paperwork, disappears in cloud of vapor. Who was that saintly vision?

Time to go home, regale spouse with more wonders of WATER. Heady ponder: If I pay a larger pledge, can I come two days a week? Or would that smack of bribery and corruption?

WATER Resources Ecumenical Moment '88

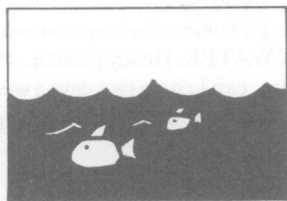
"Ecumenical Moment '88" was a two week summer institute sponsored by Auburn Theological Seminary, the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches held at Stony Point Conference Center.

Focusing on next steps for ecumenism in North America, participants from many countries, including Bangladesh, Nigeria, Canada, Korea, Sri Lanka and Spain, studied the history, problems and promises of a movement that has shaped religious groups in recent decades.

Lectures, classes, Bible study and common worship kept the pace brisk and the input flowing. Plenary remarks by theologian Letty Russell, ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison and Lutheran pastor Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter were of special interest to feminists in religion.

WATER staff members Diann Neu and Mary E. Hunt joined Kortright Davis, Anglican priest and professor of theology at Howard University Divinity School, to form a team responsible for worship and theological reflection. An opening celebration welcomed participants from the many corners of the earth. The closing ecumenical eucharist left a sense of possibility.

The challenge to be and think ecumenically remains before mainline churches. Cultural diversity and respect for difference without diluting uniqueness are goals that remain to be met. "Ecumenical Moment '88" gave feminists a reason to rejoice in how far we have come in this direction, and a reminder of how far we all need to go.



We Women Are Church--What Are We Waiting For?

by Marga Buhrig

We women are Church. Thus I have formulated the first part of my theme today. I know that this sentence can be misunderstood. It does not mean that we women are the Church, in which men may understand themselves to be "included," just as we women were permitted to feel included when our fathers and brothers spoke simply of brotherhood. When we complained, they said we were being petty. Of course we were included.

We have had enough of that, that is why we say: We are Church. And we mean by that, or perhaps I should say more carefully, I mean by that, that we do not want to ask anyone's permission about what we may do or not do.

At "Women-Church: Claiming Our Power," an ecumenical women's conference in Cincinnati that gathered 3000 participants at the beginning of October 1987, Theresa Kane said publicly: "No one has power over us, except the one whom we call holy." Theresa Kane was, as is well known, the nun who in 1979 during the first visit of the Pope to the United States publicly asked about the ordination of women in the Catholic church.

Many Protestants are of the opinion that this question about the role of women is a problem only in the Catholic church. But I am convinced that this is not true. When feminist theologians are "called back" or fired by "the Church," i.e. an institution led and characterized by men, because their thinking, formed by other experiences, does not agree with that which the church has traditionally taught and practiced, then that is an ecumenical problem.

theology and in the base communities, which are connected to real life. We are open to this idea, but at present we have enough to do to find our own suitable way, and to follow it. Today, and here, on Oct. 24 in Lucerne, we celebrate this, our being church.

But we ask ourselves what is essential to our being church?

1. Our church is ecumenical. The traditional borders between confessions have lost their meaning for us. We are, of course, all imprinted by the tradition in which we have grown up. We carry this imprint with us, even when we have the impression that we have grown out of it, and in fact have done so. These different imprints, especially those which we can still agree with, or the loss of which we mourn, are a treasure of our movement.

2. Our church is diverse. A look at the program of today's celebration shows us this. We do not live by excluding and limiting, but we are open and curious. The various workshops show this. We search for our essential theological thinking, we try out other ways to read the Bible, we use forms of spirituality, of our spiritual life in which nature and spirit, body and soul, eros and agape are reconciled with each other.

In our church, creative manual skills, artistic creation, and clear thinking are not opposites. History and vision of the future do not preclude each other, but are dependent on each other. Consciousness-raising, understood both individually and collectively, and political-social engagement are the two sides or expressions of

In our church, creative manual skills, artistic creation, and clear thinking are not opposites.

But we have resolved not to complain and lament on this Women-Church feast, not to talk much about what we do not have, but rather to celebrate that which we are. When I say "We women are church" I mean that we have again discovered gifts, experiences and tasks which belong essentially to the church, but which have been neglected, forgotten or called heresy in and by the church.

I mean that we now are on the way to live them and to formulate them. We are really on the way, but still far from the goal. For this reason we need each other so much, even if we are open to the idea that men are also on the way, e.g. in the various types of liberation

the same process. We search for feminist ethics which make the connections between everything we do. Spirituality and engagement may not be torn apart, but reach into one another.

I know this sounds very nice in theory, but we know quite well from experience that this is not lived so easily. Among ourselves we succumb again and again to the temptation of quick limiting and the fear that we could get involved in too much and in too far away fields. We do not have to do everything and can still keep the diversity.

3. In the face of the diversity, the question remains: What binds us together? To this I wish to answer as follows. The fact that we are

women at a particular historical hour binds us together. The biological fact of being women, despite its importance in the experiences of our own life and physical being, is not enough. We gathered are women in a wealthy country, most of us in the middle class, that is, women who had greater or lesser chances at education and training, at least in contrast to women in other countries and in some parts of this country.

We are women who are somehow still connected to the church, who at any rate still respond to the church by the mere fact that we came here. But we are also women who no longer feel addressed by the traditional forms of being church, or even feel excluded or oppressed. "We women are leaving Egypt" is the title of a workshop here. We are on our way, in diverse paths and lifestyles.

That does not mean that everyone does everything; there must be delegation, if we don't want to exhaust each other. And there are diverse gifts. But it has to do with mutual recognition, and of as much interchangeability and mutuality as possible, with consultation with everyone about how this "church" shall be organized. This includes also the possibility that mistakes can occur, that conflicts can arise, that forgiveness and a new start are possible.

Perhaps you think that that would be nice, but how will it be in reality? My dear sisters, it will become reality, in that today we are everywhere starting to live that which we hold to be right, what we believe and hope. We need not wait for anyone, to do this for us. Some of us will do this in the setting of a community, of a parish, a church organization, and at the same

We are essentially taking part in the becoming whole, in the healing of church and creation.

At the American conference which was mentioned earlier, we sang a song which began: "We are a gentle, angry people." We are angry about a church and a society in which men dominate, which are structured in a patriarchal way. But at the same time we are focused on each other and the world lovingly.

We have also, in my opinion, a common goal: our paths, hopefully, are converging toward a church and a society in which, as Paolo Freire said once, it will be easier to love, and in which more justice shall be realized, not only for us, but for all human beings.

4. We understand ourselves and the church as a community of equals, of human beings who stand on the same level, in which there are no permanent rulers and ruled. For this view there are various biblical arguments and allusions. The prophetic line in the Old Testament, which was also taken up by Jesus, speaks of the downfall of the mighty and thereby the choice for the little people, for the poor.

Jesus himself called women and men to follow him and they were all equal. Think about such persons as Mary Magdalene. Even the Apostle Paul, rejected by so many feminists, takes up in Galatians 3:28 an old baptismal creed in which it is said that the superiority of men over women has been abolished in the community of believers. This community we can surely understand in the widest sense.

It is my conviction that in the church which Jesus wished there are no permanent offices, no priestly or "learned" hierarchy, which excludes some--the women, the laity, the uneducated, the handicapped, the minorities. In the church, as I wish it, all can participate in the creation of religious services, of liturgy, in commitment to the burning questions of our time.

time in a group outside the church in which they will find the strength and nourishment which they need.

Others will search outside of the institutional churches, for ways to spirituality and engagement, and nevertheless will feel that they belong to the entire movement which is expressed here at the women-church celebration.

What about the reaction of the official churches? I think the disagreements will become harder as we become stronger. We are dangerous merely by our presence, merely by our existence. On the other hand I ask myself: Just how strong are the institutional churches still? I think that we women, that women-church is a fundamental ferment of a far-reaching change in the churches, a ferment which starts or strengthens or accelerates a fermentation process.

I believe that the Sophia, a figure of the divine spirit, is with us, and that we are essentially taking part in the becoming whole, in the healing of church and creation. At the end, for me there is not a women-church, but a worldwide community of equally blessed and equally participating human beings, a community of women, men and children. Let us strengthen each other, live this vision now, and empower each other, today, to be church in this way.

Dr. Marga Buhig, Swiss theologian, feminist church woman and one of the co-presidents of the World Council of Churches, wrote this as the keynote address at the Frauen Kirken Fest (Women-Church Celebration) held in Lucerne, Switzerland, October 1987. We print it to share the growth and diversity of the women-church movement throughout the world. Thanks to Joan Gurian for the translation from the German.



PRESS RELEASE

June 9, 1988

WATER Heralds Women's Solidarity on Reproductive Rights

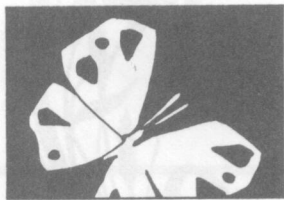
Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey represent religious feminists' commitment to reproductive rights. The decision of the General Governing Group of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to halt the dismissal process makes clear that Catholic women will work together to transform a patriarchal church.

WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, applauds Sisters Ferraro and Hussey for their steadfast and courageous position as publicly pro-choice Catholic women. Their willingness to educate their religious community on the importance of reproductive choice as part of a comprehensive social justice program, especially for poor women, is an important contribution to Catholic social teaching.

"Today we join with Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey in a show of solidarity with all Catholic women seeking justice," said WATER co-director Dr. Mary E. Hunt. "The decision is a victory for the whole church. Indeed, that there can be pro-choice members of Catholic religious communities bolsters religious freedom for all."

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Update: Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey resigned from the Sisters of Notre Dame in July.



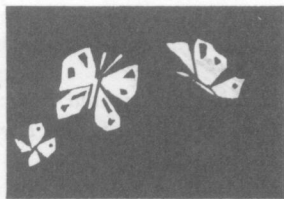
Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women

WATER endorses the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), a project of the World Council of Churches. We will stay in close contact with the project through Joan Campbell, who heads the US Office of the World Council.

The Decade aims at:

1. Empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church.
2. Affirming--through shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality--the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities.
3. Giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.
4. Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teachings and practices that discriminate against women.
5. Encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.

A resource booklet with prayers, poems, songs and stories from across the globe, as well as other resources are available from World Council of Churches, US Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015.



The Saving Grace Of Fun

by Diann Neu and Mary E. Hunt

INTRODUCTION

Summer is a time for vacations, play, and fun, even in cities like Washington where work never seems to stop. We are used to discussing justice issues, work for social change, even spirituality. But religion also has to do with pleasure, enjoyment, plain fun. These are marks of salvation just as surely as are good works and struggle.

We combed the major feminist theological writers for insights on this theme and found very little. Male theologians like Hugo Rahner and Sam Keen have written on the topic. But most women, understandably, have done so much work, shouldered so many responsibilities just trying to survive, that play has been low on our list. Yet even people who are economically poor know the value and necessity of enjoying life for its own sake, building community and developing ourselves by sports, games, music, dancing, hobbies, recreation.

In this celebration we take time to recognize and lift up fun as an integral part of salvation, to see it as a human right. By doing so we affirm each other in yet another dimension of who we are, and we look forward to the time when the pleasure of eternal life will be ours.

SONG: "The Women Must Be Gathering"

by Susan Beehler
c 1987 Susan Beehler

I can feel it; feel the movement
The women must be gathering!
Feel the watertide a moving.
The women must be gathering!
Hear the call--See the power;
Smell the vision;
Feel the world!
I can feel it; feel the movement.
The women must be gathering. (3x)

OPENING PRAYER: "Joy"

by Clarissa Scott Delany
from Seasons of Woman

Joy shakes me like the wind that lifts a sail,
Like the roistering wind
That laughs through stalwart pines.
It floods me like the sun
On rain-drenched trees
That flash with silver and green.
I abandon myself to joy--
I laugh--I sing.
Too long have I walked a desolate way,
Too long stumbled down a maze
Bewildered.

SONG RESPONSE: "Rejoice,"

traditional round sung three times

- ¹Rejoice in our God always, and again I say
Rejoice!
Rejoice in our God/ess always, and again I say
Rejoice!
²Rejoice! Rejoice! And again I say Rejoice!(2x)

FIRST READING: "God Laughing Out Loud" by Mary E. Hunt c 1988 WATER

In the beginning God enjoyed herself.
She laughed out loud and laughed some more
because it was good.
She sat back and smiled.
She clapped her hands in glee and she imagined
her sisters dancing.
She did nothing but enjoy and it was everything.

God knew that there was work to be done--a
world to create, people to form and a whole
cosmos to plan.

She even glimpsed the fact that creation would
include meetings and that there would be in-
justice to right, and still she laughed, knowing that
in the end it was all about pleasure.

She explained to no one in particular that
enjoyment is what she intended life to be about:
pleasure is the first principle.
She knew that other would-be divinities
stressed work and obligation.
She reasoned quite astutely that if joy for all
were the goal, then everyone could rest and
relax, at least some of the time.
Just thinking about this made her grin.

Light years later, when creation came into
being and people began to toil and sweat their
way, she noticed that her first principle had
been replaced by work and pain.

So she sent a reminder of her legacy. She gave
it several names: vacation, leisure, relaxation,
recreation, fun.

Some thought it was a vestige of days gone by.
But God knew that it was the real thing.
She called it salvation.

REFLECTION I

We want to explore together how we have
fun, what we enjoy doing for its own sake. Most
of us still work; some of us are retired. What we
do for fun now tells us something very impor-
tant about our values.

In groups of two discuss what you will do during this summer just for fun. How much time will you dedicate to hobbies? To leisure? How can we encourage each other in this as we encourage each other in the pursuit of justice?

SONG RESPONSE: "Rejoice"

SECOND READING: an excerpt from "Poetry is Not a Luxury" by Audre Lorde from Sister Outsider

"As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us...

When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.

But as we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes."

REFLECTION II

Audre Lorde makes it clear that poetry is not a luxury. Recreation/leisure is not a luxury either. In fact, it tells us something about ourselves which is just as important as what we learn about ourselves through work, vocation, even political commitment. A good way to think about this is to think about retirement. We all know that retired people are very busy, but many of them are doing what they like to do, not what they have to do.

In groups of 3-4 discuss what a perfect day in your retirement would look like. What activities would be included? What would be done for fun?

SONG RESPONSE: "Rejoice"

COMMUNITY SHARING

Let us gather up the fruit of our leisure into the bread and cup of salvation. Let us pray, those who wish, speaking in a word or phrase what we bring to our common life by way of leisure/fun/recreation.

(Individuals speak their word or phrase)

EUCCHARISTIC BLESSING

We use the words of Julian of Norwich to bless and share the bread and fruit of the vine. Our forefathers kept themselves sane and happy. They have gone before us into the perpetual leisure of death. We prepare to follow them.

BREAD BLESSING

This bread symbolizes for us wonder and surprise, letting go and delight in God. Let us extend our hands, palms up, and bless this bread, listening to the words of our sister Julian.

Our soul must perform two duties.
The one is we must reverently wonder
and be surprised;

the other is we must gently
let go and let be
always taking pleasure in God.

Seeing God in this life
cannot be a continuous experience.

We often fail to see God
and then we fall into ourselves
and feel there is something wrong
with us--that we are perverse
and responsible for the entrance of
sin into the world
and all subsequent sins.

These feelings affect us mentally
and physically.

But the Holy Spirit, the endless life
living within us,
makes us peaceful and at ease,
harmonious and flexible.

Julian of Norwich

WINE / JUICE BLESSING

This fruit of the vine symbolizes strength and happiness. Let us extend our hands and bless it listening to the words of our sister Julian.

It is God's will
that we do all in our power
to keep ourselves strong
for happiness is everlasting
and pain is passing and will end.
Therefore it is not God's will
that we pine and mourn
over feelings of pain
but that we get better
and continue to enjoy life.

Julian of Norwich

In the spirit of our foremothers, let us eat,
drink and be merry...

(Bread, wine and juice are shared)



CLOSING SONG: "Hip Swinging A Safe Road" by Carolyn McDade
(words adapted for the occasion)
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(Sing standing in a circle swaying with arms around one another)

A people are not hurt by resting women
When women take time
their people are not hurt (2x)

All of us together until all of us can go
Hip swinging a safe road (3x)
Hip swinging a safe, safe road.

A people are not hurt by joyful women
When women feel good
their people are not hurt (2x)

All of us together til all of us can go
Relaxing toward justice
Refreshing toward justice
Relaxing toward justice
Refreshing toward justice

A people are not hurt by playful women
When women have fun
their people are not hurt (2x)

All of us together til all of us can go
At home in our own land (3x)
At home in our own homeland.

SENDING FORTH:

The circle is broken as people begin to embrace one another.

Diann Neu, liturgist, and Mary E. Hunt, theologian, are co-founders and co-directors of WATER. This liturgy was first celebrated with Sisters Against Sexism (SAS), a women's liturgical base community, in Silver Spring, MD in June 1988.

Resources

All of the following are available for donors to borrow from the WATER Resource Center or they can be purchased at your favorite feminist bookstore.

Boucher, Sandy Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

The story of how North American women are transforming Buddhism from a feminist perspective.

Bozarth, Alla Renee Womanpriest: A Personal Odyssey. San Diego: Luramedia, 1988. A revised version of the popular story of one woman's journey to the Episcopal priesthood.

Carr, Anne E. Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

A contribution to systematic theology from a feminist perspective with attention to how women's experience "informs and transforms the basic elements of Christian spirituality."

Carson, Anne Feminist Spirituality and The Feminine Divine: An Annotated Bibliography. Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1986. A good collection of over 700 annotated entries in feminist spirituality. A useful tool for those who are researching women's issues in religion.

Harris, Maria Women and Teaching: Themes for a Spirituality of Pedagogy. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

The Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality focuses women's learning including silence, remembering, ritual mourning, artistry and birthing.

Laffey, Alice L. An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988

A helpful complement to introductory texts in Hebrew Scriptures; a solid, basic work that brings together many recent insights in the field.

Lorde, Audre A Burst of Light. Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1988.

Essential feminist theory from one of the great writers of our time; her battle with cancer and her brilliant, courageous approach to life make this an exquisite read.

Preus, Marilyn, editor Serving the Word. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988.

Lutheran church women discuss their experiences as teachers, ordained ministers, volunteers, members of clergy couples, and working in ecumenical relations.

Schaffran, Janet and Kozak, Pat, editors More than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities. Oak Park, Illinois: Meyer Stone Books, 1988.

Prayer, liturgies, music and commentary suitable for many occasions using inclusive language and imagery; includes the work of Colleen Fullmer and Diann Neu among others.

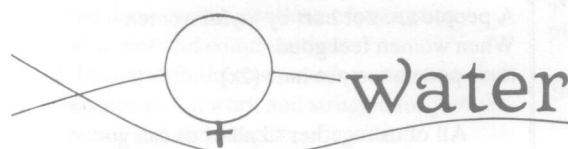
Not For Men Only

Brod, Harry A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity. Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1988.

A wide ranging collection of essays on Jewish men from a feminist perspective. Many useful insights which prove that feminism is having a deep impact on self and communal understandings.

Nelson, James B. The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Male Spirituality. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988.

The author of Embodiment continues his discussion of sexuality and spirituality focusing on men's experiences, especially the genitalization of sex. His section on friendship is noteworthy for men and women who wish to explore men's possibilities in that arena.



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