



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

Editorial

Young feminists deserve better when it comes to religious options. So we believe at WATER. At a recent symposium in Boston on Jesuits and women, a young woman addressed the audience: "I want to be part of the church," she said, "but unlike my friends who seem to fit, I don't have a place." She went on to describe the contradictions - familiar to readers of this newsletter - and to conclude that she did not know where else to look.

Hers was not a plaintive cry for help so much as a sad statement of fact. Decades into feminist work in religion, we are far from providing what our children need. We have raised them as feminists and now they find it hard to be religious. Admittedly, most young people find it hard to be religious, but when those who seek cannot find because it does not exist, we have much more work to do.

WATER's internship program is one opportunity for young women to gain an introduction to the field. Our recently inaugurated Girls' Spirituality Group is another, with pre-teens happily littering the office with popcorn as they explore their spirits. The mother of one of the girls was pregnant with her daughter when she participated in the founding of WATER. Now that daughter calls on her own behalf to find out about her group. Time flies when you're doing your part.

The Grail's Young Women's Network is a creative choice (932 O'Bannonville Rd., Loveland OH 45140). Women's Ordination Conference is sponsoring a Young Feminist Network (P.O. Box 2693, Fairfax VA 22031) that is generating enthusiasm. We are anxious to learn about other such programs so as to answer the question of "a place for me" with more detail in the future.

We will have a daughter in the office on TAKE OUR DAUGHTERS TO WORK DAY sponsored by MS. magazine. Indeed we have that toddler several days a week in a small gesture toward a women-friendly world. Here's hoping you will keep our collective future in mind when planning events and designing programs. Younger ones want to be included, on their own terms. They deserve it and we need them.

What's Prayer Got To Do With It?

by Mary E. Hunt

If Tina Turner can ask about love, I can ask about prayer. We both hang around fields where the topics are central - she in rock music, I in theology - but apparently neither of us is sure what the answer is or we wouldn't need to raise the question. Or maybe the question is the heart of the matter in each case because the answers are certainly vague.

Prayer trumps sex and money as a postmodern taboo. It used to be that discussing one's sex life - partner(s) and/or practices - was the essence of bad taste. Now such matters are the stuff of talk shows, common fare at parties, even safe for classroom discussion in more enlightened circles. Ditto for money, though a little less so now that the stock market is booming and many boomers are stocked. But will prayer ever make such a splash, or are we still too timid, perhaps embarrassed, to discuss what it means?

Prayer is a puzzling topic. Most people say

for anything. Accompanying, attending to, paying attention, seeking union with, standing in the presence of, thanking or blaming, laughing or lamenting, yes, but pleading, no.

The dilemma of prayer is compounded for feminists who find suspect virtually every inherited form of worship and are busy making up our own as we go. Still, for all the talk of feminist liturgy and ritual, indeed for all that WATER has promoted this approach, I wonder how our prayer differs from other kinds of prayer. Of course our prayer is done in inclusive language, imagery and symbolism, which alone is enough to make it quite different. And it is carried out in egalitarian ways of leading communal prayer. But at base the act of praying is so fundamental to humans that it is no wonder resistance to change in it is so mighty; Orthodox Jewish women, for example, shake the universe when they dare to read publicly from the Torah.

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they do it, but if they do, they can't say when they've finished, what difference it has made, and how to do it the same way again. Many people claim a spiritual practice or "work a program," but is it prayer? This preliminary exploration is an invitation to push the proverbial envelope on prayer, if you can find it.

Prayer comes from the Latin, *precari*, "to entreat" or "to obtain by begging." It also means an earnest request. Happily, the range of meanings to prayer is much broader; last time I checked, most feminist theologians did not recommend the kind of relationship with the divine which puts us in the position of pleading

I come from a tradition in which prayer is a given. The rosary served my mother and her friends as a way to pray, a kind of meditation. They repeated the same prayer to Mary over and over again, interspersed with a few other invocations, but generally kept a Marian focus. Maybe they knew something I am only learning about praying with female imagery.

I've really never understood what they got from the experience. Perhaps prayer is simply time set aside for oneself, not a bad thing for anyone, especially for busy women, but is it more than that? Maybe one doesn't get anything more from
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WATER is a feminist educational center, a network 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 doing programs, projects, publications, workshops, retreats, counseling and liturgical planning which have helped thousands of people to be a part of an inclusive church and society.

WATERwheel is published quarterly by the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. Annual subscription, \$35. Address inquiries to the WATER office. Additional copies of this issue can be ordered for \$5 each. **Complimentary copies are available on request for conferences, seminars, classes or discussion groups.** Include street address and daytime telephone number of the person ordering materials. Send inquiries and comments to:

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If you or someone you know would like to receive **WATERwheel** on tape, we will be happy to arrange for audio transcription of the issue(s) you desire. Contact WATER, 301-589-2509. Cassettes will be made by Volunteers for the Visually Handicapped at a cost of \$10 per tape.

What's Prayer...

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it than attentive time, which, again, last time I checked, was in limited supply for all of us. But my feminist curiosity is still not satisfied.

Feminist theologian Jane Redmont is writing a book on the topic, **When in Doubt, Sing**. She speaks with authority when she says, "Just do it." She reports that, contrary to popular opinion, "We are a culture of prayers." Even people with no relationship to institutionalized religion pray. She is not referring to the spontaneous act of desperation as the plane goes down, rather to the fact that most people develop some form that they call prayer, whether fixed and formal or sporadic and spontaneous. Rationalist that I am, I want to know what they do, what difference it makes and how it can be replicated. To all of my inquiries about what she has discovered in her research, she keeps coming back patiently to the same mantra, "Just pray. There is no other way to understand it." So I turn to prayer books.

John Tully Carmody chronicled his dying in a prayer book, a psalter of laments as some have called it, **God Is No Illusion: Meditations on the End of Life** (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997). It is a powerful example of prayer - the words, images and faith of a man who is no newcomer to this medium, indeed a person comfortable with the traditional Christian language of prayer. The book is a rave and I admire his

problems were diagnosed. Her thoroughly agnostic specialist was said to affirm the value of prayer when the physician realized how effectively the patient had recovered from what were presumed to be irremedial ills. Perhaps the doctor was humoring her, encouraging her to continue her remarkable progress. But I bet the doctor was as perplexed as the rest of us and had to admit what prayer points to, namely, that everything does not have a rational, scientific explanation.

The problem is that mechanizing prayer, looking for results, measuring efficiency, setting up double-blind experiments, is measuring something qualitative against a quantitative scale. It is tempting, but finally futile. Much as most of us would welcome clear evidence that prayer works, what it means to "work" is not that predictable results happen. In fact, most praying people report quite unpredictable results, *c'est la vie*. Through prayer, they are able to live with whatever happens with greater equanimity, or so they say.

Meaning and value are not cut and dried. We don't have all the answers. Perhaps prayer is simply a time we set aside to acknowledge that reality. Maybe it is the time we take to become increasingly comfortable with the larger reality of which we are a part, the longer, unto eternity, time we will live without the illusion of control. Maybe prayer is a way to focus our attention on the needs of the world, beginning with those

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strength in the face of terminal illness. But I still have a hard time saying "God bless you" when someone sneezes, and I know I'm not the only one.

When science got hold of prayer I knew something was stirring. Larry Dossey is a physician whose forays into alternative medicine include a serious interest in prayer. He claims in **Prayer Is Good Medicine** (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1996) that science can show that prayer "works," but not how. Rather unscientific, this is attractive at one level. To be told by scientists that ailing animals that were prayed for improved and animals that were left out did not gets my attention. Animal advocates have another worry when prayer is shown to be so powerful. What if animals can pray and they get the same results with humans! Science is grand except when it oversteps its bounds.

From a patient's point of view comes a similar report. A well known spiritual leader, who had taught many people to pray, was prayed for by hundreds of people when her neurological

whose need is greatest. Tina, that's what love has to do with it.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is your experience of prayer?
2. How do you pray with children?
3. What do you think prayer has to do with it?

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., feminist liberation theologian and ethicist, is co-director of WATER.



How Does the Garden Grow?

The first meeting of "A Shared Garden" took place for two weeks in January in the center of Santiago, Chile, under the cooling grape arbors of the Santo Domingo Convent. Little did most ordinary citizens realize what was going on behind those walls!

Fifty women from ten countries arrived to pool their collective wisdom on "Beyond Violence: Ecofeminism and Solidarity" through workshops, lectures, body work, liturgies and discussions. The women came from a range of feminist groups which are loosely connected through common concerns for social and ecclesial justice for women. A high priority was placed on the participants' commitment to replicate aspects

ness and for whom promise support. The Chilean crowd outlined their country in rope on the pavement and instructed us about the products and problems of each region. Nicaragua's two led the group in that country's popular feast of December 7, La Purisima, a celebration of the Virgin Mary. Yes, grown women can sing and scream like kids to receive treats, all the while learning that popular religion can be shaped to political advantage. Diann Neu co-coordinated the liturgies and led a group discussion on creating feminist rituals.

Participants lived in women's centers and with families in the city, scattering each evening to the far reaches of Santiago. They returned each

Each woman... brought an amazing richness of insight.

of the work in their home groups, and especially to share with women who have few opportunities to explore spirituality and politics on their own terms.

Each day began with Tai Chi and closed with worship focused on one of the countries represented. The group was primarily Latin American - from Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela - along with two U.S. theological students. Leadership was provided by Con-spirando of Santiago, Pe No Chao of Recife, Brazil, and WATER. Each woman, whether in her small group or through a presentation on her work, whether in informal conversation or prayer, brought an amazing richness of insight.

The meeting room for the Garden was adorned with a huge painting of the Dominicans' finest medieval theologians at work: a globe off to one side; books predominating with monks pointing to key passages as they pronounce their theological verdicts (and young monks obviously having to listen to the wisdom of their elders). The painting provided a sharp contrast to the methods and sources in the Garden, where all women were encouraged to contribute their talents to a just planet.

We began with our embodied experiences, naming key moments and happenings in our own lives and correlating them to what was happening in our respective countries. We traced the contextual contours which ground our theological reflections, and we came to appreciate both the diversity and the parallels. Then we could take a big step toward change by looking at myths and symbols, beliefs and practices which make violence normative and justice fleeting.

Liturgies reinforced the agenda. Our Mexican sister prayed in forms indigenous to her home region. Our Cuban companera invited each country to express solidarity with her pueblo, from whom we from the U.S. could only beg forgive-

ness and for whom promise support. The Chilean crowd outlined their country in rope on the pavement and instructed us about the products and problems of each region. Nicaragua's two led the group in that country's popular feast of December 7, La Purisima, a celebration of the Virgin Mary. Yes, grown women can sing and scream like kids to receive treats, all the while learning that popular religion can be shaped to political advantage. Diann Neu co-coordinated the liturgies and led a group discussion on creating feminist rituals.

Participants lived in women's centers and with families in the city, scattering each evening to the far reaches of Santiago. They returned each morning with concrete experiences of the ravages of neo-liberalism on poor people, the myth of the "Chilean economic miracle" for all but the very rich. Globalization came under careful scrutiny, as the impact of the information and transportation explosions is so clearly skewed in favor of the have's.

A highlight of the Garden was a weekend at one of Chile's famed beaches. Dancing was a popular way to relax, with the Brazilian women teaching movements some of us did not know the human body could achieve. Grace and eros took on new meaning when undergirded by respect and friendship.

At a public session, theologians Ivone Gebara and Mary Hunt pushed the analytic horizons.

More than one hundred fifty women (and a few men) turned out to experience a mini version of the seminar. From habited nuns to young students, they took part in a rousing discussion on feminist work in religion accompanied by a liturgy exorcising the ills of kyriarchy. Some suspected that the roof might fly off when participants shouted "Vete, be gone!" to a litany of ills.

All gardens have weeds, but what was remarkable in this one was the spirit of cooperation and good will that prevailed among fifty strong personalities out of their respective elements. Of course there were differing views of how to achieve a balance between body and mind, between experience and analysis. But the success of this first gathering had to do with the urgency of the matters we face - the threats to survival that global economic, ecological and ecclesiastical policies constitute, and the relatively few "flowers" who are willing to dedicate the lifetimes it takes to make real change.

The next Garden will be cultivated in Washington DC this summer, with talk of another one in 1998 in the Northeast of Brazil. The world needs more gardeners. Gloves optional.



June Garden in Washington DC

WATER will host the next gathering of "A Shared Garden" in Washington DC this June 18-27. Potential participants may apply directly to WATER for admission.

The group will be made up of about twenty-five women from both continents. This time the majority will be from North America, with young women and women of color especially invited. Ideally, participants will come from and return to groups with which WATER, Con-spirando and Pe No Chao work. We hope that groups with whom we work, such as member groups of the Women-Church Convergence, various women's theological programs, anti-violence groups and the like, will plan to send a representative. Imagine what she will bring back to your community for next year's programs.

The working language will be English. The schedule will include panels, small group discussions, lectures, visits in the Washington area, body work and liturgies. As in Chile, we hope for fun and celebration as well as serious analytic and strategic work.

The theme of the second Garden is related to the first: "Beyond Violence: Feminist Theological Solidarity in Diversity," reflecting our shared concern with how eco-conscious justice work can help to eradicate violence.

Please contact WATER now for application information. It will include full details of costs, schedule and housing options, as well as scholarship information and related matters. If you live in the Washington area and can offer housing to a participant (or two) please let us know. The success of this program will involve lots of local support. Call WATER 301/589-2509, FAX 301/589-3150 or e-mail: water@hers.com.

How do feminists pray? Let me count the ways...

Feminists who pray are searching for the Holy and for new names and understandings of G*d. We yearn to relate to the divine, to one another and to all creation without the distortions of patriarchy and kyriarchy. We are reclaiming women's traditions of prayer and we are creating new ways of praying.

This liturgy is one public invitation to share insights and experiences about prayer. Use it for yourself and for your community. And create your own.

Preparation

Gather symbols of prayer: a bell, a large bowl to create a well, candles. Fill the bowl with water and place it on an altar in the center of a circle. Place floating candles, flowers and shells around this well. Provide a cup and a paper with quotes from the "Thoughts on Prayer" section of this liturgy for each participant.

Call to Prayer

(One woman rings the bell three times and proclaims:)

From generation to generation, our mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers heard bells that called them to prayer, and they prayed. Some of us still pray, reluctantly. Many of us used to pray. A number of us don't or can't pray. Most of us have difficulty praying kyriarchal prayers. Some of us are reclaiming women's traditions of prayer. Others are creating new prayers.

Today we take our place in the stories of prayers. "Come, pray with us," they call. And we pray in the form of meditation, song and dance; reading, writing and conversations; praise, petition and thanksgiving; tears, cries for help and lamentations; stillness, gazing and waiting; fasting, feasting and Eucharist; liturgies, meditations and political actions.

Tonight we gather at Sophia-Wisdom's well to pray together, and to share our experiences and struggles with prayer.

Song: "Prayer to Friends" by Carolyn McDade, from **This Tough Spun Web**, c 1984.

To this day I bring my life
Born of hope, born of sand
Yearning joy where now there's strife
All I have, all I am

Help me to see what I must see
Help me to be where I must be
Restless faith abide 'til all are free
Fill my life, turn my hand

A Circle of Prayers

(She continues:)

Let us take off our shoes. The Japanese take off their shoes before entering a house, a sacred place. The people of the Hebrew scriptures took off their shoes to stand on holy ground. (Pause)

Tonight we walk on the holy ground of prayer. What wells up inside of you when you hear the word prayer? (Pause) Let's share our names and a word or phrase about prayer. (Naming)

Gathering Prayer

(One gestures for all to stand, hold hands, and walk into the center, raising hands together. She prays and all repeat:)

Sophia-Spirit, teach us to pray. (All repeat)

(Continuing to hold hands, all walk outward, then return to the center, raising hands together for the second time. One prays and all repeat:)

Sophia-Spirit, Source of Life, be with us as we remember the prayers of our ancestors.

(Continuing to hold hands, all walk outward, then return to the center, raising hands together for the third time. One prays and all repeat:)

Sophia-Spirit, Source of Life, Font of Wisdom, encourage us to transform prayer. Amen. Blessed Be. Let It Be So.

(Continuing to hold hands, all walk outward.)

Song: "In Your Presence" by Colleen Fulmer, from **Dancing Sophia's Circle**, c 1994.

(One initiates swaying to the rhythm of the song before the melody begins and continues the swaying after the melody ends.)

We are bathed in radiance, clothed in glory,
Crowned in splendor, embraced in joy.
O Wisdom Sophia, Wisdom Sophia,
The power and presence of God.

Thoughts on Prayer

(Different people read each quote, pausing after each. A good source of quotes is **The New Beacon Book of Quotations by Women** ed. by Rosalie Maggio, 1996.)

Listen to women's thoughts on prayer. Our sung response after every third one is "Call to Prayer."

The life of prayer is so great and various there is something in it for everyone. It is like a garden which grows everything, from alpenes to potatoes.

-- Evelyn Underhill, **Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill**, ed. Lucy Menzies

Prayer is the language of the heart.

-- Grace Aguilar, **The Spirit of Judaism**

What we are doing when we pray as feminists in our respective traditions is something very radical in the literal sense of the word, that is, challenging our traditions at the very root. Some-

Come,

by Diann L. Neu



times we challenge by refusing, by using no words. Sometimes we challenge by creating new words that smash the old words. Both ways are powerful acts of resistance.

-- Marjorie Procter-Smith, **Women at Worship**

Song Response: "Call to Prayer" by Carolyn

McDade from **This Ancient Love**, c 1988.

For each part is a part of each other part.

We all are a part of one another.

As for prayer, don't burden yourself with making considerations; neither your mind or mine is good at that. Follow your own way of speaking to God sincerely, lovingly, confidently and simply, as your heart dictates.

-- Jane de Chantal, **Letters of Spiritual Direction**

To pray is to work, to work is to pray.

-- Ancient motto of the Benedictine Order

Prayer is essentially a process by which ideals are enabled to become operative in our lives. It may be more than this, but it is at least this.

-- Georgia Harkness, **The Recovery of Ideals**

Song Response: "Call to Prayer"

When the winds of Orisha blow
even the roots of grass quicken.

-- Audre Lorde from "The Winds of Orisha"

Prayer is naught else but a yearning of soul... It draws down the great God into the little heart; it drives the hungry soul up to the plenitude of God; it brings together these two lovers, God and the soul, in a wondrous place where they speak much of love.

-- Mechtilde of Magdeburg, **Mirrors of the Holy**, ed. Lucy Menzies

Pray With Us

Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.

-- Simone Weil, **Gravity and Grace**

Song Response: "Call to Prayer"

I don't know how I could survive the indifference and evil and violence rife in our nation and world, and the shallowness and pettiness of so much of Washington's self-important life, without these seeds of faith, prayer, and music that were planted in my youthful soul by parents and other elders.

--Marian Wright Edelman, **Guide My Feet**

Pray inwardly, even if you do not enjoy it. It does good, though you feel nothing. Yes, even though you think you are doing nothing.

-- Julian of Norwich, **Revelations of Divine Love**

... I betook myself to prayer and in every lonely place I found an altar.

-- Elizabeth, bondswoman and minister, born in Maryland, 1766, from **The Black Woman's Gumbo Ya-Ya**

Song Response: "Call to Prayer"

Personal Prayer of Solitude

(One invites all to meditation.)

Take a cup and come to the well of women's wisdom. Dip it into the water and take a drink. Take a paper with the women's thoughts on prayer you just heard, find a place for quiet reflection, put your body into a prayer posture - lying down, sitting with hands open, clenched fists, kneeling, yoga positions - drink water as desired and pray with the prayer thoughts.

Listen to what is going on when feminists pray. Listen to how a prayerful feminist lives. Listen to how you pray and live.

Read the words slowly. Take some deep breaths and sit quietly. Read the words again. Listen to the word or phrase that attracts your attention. Be comfortable with silent spaces between your thoughts.

Read the words once more. Be quiet. Be open to their effect on you.

When you hear the bell ring after ten minutes, come back to the circle. *(Reflecting)*

Shared Prayer

(The bell ringer sounds the bell three times to call people to the well.)

Let us take a few minutes to share our reflections on prayer. What is going on when feminists pray? How does a prayerful feminist live? How do you pray and live? Share with us a glimpse of your prayerful reflections, then float

a candle or flower, place a shell or pour water into the communal well. *(Sharing)*

Song Response: "Call to Prayer"

Prayers of the Faithful

Many need us to pray with them or to pray for them this night. Let us pray with those around the world. Let our response be, "Compassionate Holy Listener, hear our prayer."

A daughter sighs with resignation at the death of her mother.

Response: Compassionate Holy Listener, hear our prayer.

An aunt prays with her nephew at bedtime.

Response:

A friend knocks at the door to offer comfort during a time of despair. **Response:**

A lover exclaims in ecstasy in the arms of the beloved. **Response:**

A single mother pleads for comfort and reassurance during moments of crisis. **Response:**

A woman cries in anger in a kyriarchal church. **Response:**

A despairing teenager laments in the face of physical violence. **Response:**

An unemployed woman offers a moment of thanks for finding a new job. **Response:**

A mother cries for help when her daughter is pregnant unexpectedly. **Response:**

For whom else do we pray? **Response:**

Song Response: "Call to Prayer"

Eucharistic Prayer

(Play instrumental music as the blessers set the table with bread, milk and honey. One blessing takes the bread into her hands and says:)

Come, pray with us. Touch this bread, or touch someone who is touching the bread, and remember women's prayers. *(Pause)* Blessed be this bread and blessed be those who pray.

(Two other blessers pray in turn:)

Blessed are you, Sophia-Wisdom, for you promise your people food for the journey.

Blessed are you, Bread of Life, for you send your people manna as they wander in the desert.

(The blessers break the bread and invite each person to do the same and then eat it.)

(The first blessing takes the cup of milk and honey into her hands and says:)

Come, pray with us. Touch this cup, or touch someone who is touching the cup, and remember women's prayers. *(Pause)* Blessed be this cup of milk and honey and blessed be those who pray.

(The other two blessers pray in turn:)

Blessed are you, Source of Life, for you refresh us with a firm and daring spirit.

Blessed are you, Grandmother, for even though we drink, you keep us hungry for change.

(The blessers drink from the cup and invite each person to do the same.)

Blessing of Prayerful People

Who is a prayerful person? How do we recognize one? We close, blessing aspects of prayerful people.

A prayerful person laughs and enjoys life.

Response: Let us laugh and enjoy life.

A prayerful person resists all forms of domination.

Response: Let us resist all forms of domination.

A prayerful person notices signs of new life.

Response: Let us notice signs of new life.

... gazes in awe at a colorful sunset. **Response:** ... pays attention to goodness and sees things as they are. **Response:**

... calls the best out of people, not the worst. **Response:**

... lives deeply in touch with her own and the world's troubles. **Response:**

... lets herself welcome a bold, daring, new adventure. **Response:**

What else do we want to say about prayerful people? Tell us and we will respond. *(Sharing)*

Kiss of Prayer

Let us honor ourselves and the prayerful people around us. Hold hands. First kiss your right hand, then kiss the hand of the person on your right. Next kiss your left hand and kiss the hand of the person on your left. *(Kissing)*

Sending Forth

Let us go forth as prayerful people.

May we fill our lives with solitude.

May we be alive to connections we share with creation, with one another, with the divine.

May we bless the world with our prayers.

Amen. Blessed Be. Let It Be So.

Prayer Song: "Blessing Song" by M. T. Winter, from **Woman Prayer, Woman Song**, c 1987. May the blessing of God go before you. May Her grace and peace abound. May Her Spirit live within you. May Her love wrap you 'round. May Her blessing remain with you always. May you walk on holy ground.

Diann L. Neu, MDiv, STM, MSW, feminist liturgist and psychotherapist, is co-director of WATER.



Girl Talk

The girls' spirituality group is at it again. Cory, Kalea, Lauren, Meg and Rachael (ages 11-12) meet once a week for one hour (plus time for a snack) and wrap their minds and bodies around such experiences as telling personal stories, sharing qualities of friendship, cleaning up the environment and blessing their physical selves.

At a recent meeting the girls talked about the positive and negative feelings they have about their bodies. They created sacred space by lighting a round candle to remind them of their connection to the round earth and the roundness of women's bodies. They told the story of creation from a feminist point of view: woman was created in the image of God, Sophia-Wisdom, just like each of them.

Each girl used clay to make a part of her body that she likes or a part she doesn't like right now. Then each wrote a blessing for that part and shared it with the group.

After placing her clay figure on the table by the candle, each girl read her blessing(s) and touched that part of her body as she blessed it. The group repeated the blessing, each touching that part of her own body. These are the blessings the girls wrote and shared in the group.

Bless my mind for all it is, and for being there when times are rough.

Bless my arms that help me climb.

Bless my legs that will get me to college (I hope).

Bless my heart that helps me love.

Bless my consciousness for telling me what's right.

Bless my lips that help me talk and ask questions.

Bless my nose that smells the freshness of spring.

Bless my hands that touch with care.

Bless my eyes that see beauty.

Bless my toes that keep me balanced.

Bless my hair that sways in the wind and keeps my head warm.

Bless my ears that hear the sound of all things that go round and round.

Thanks for the faces that show feelings when words are unable.

Thanks for vertebrae that let me crack my back which feels good.

Be good, arms. Be good, legs. Be good, eyes. Be good, body.

Do I really have to say this?

One can't say hand I have no need of you, Or eye I have no want for you.

There are many parts but one body.

Home Bodies

by Cynthia Lapp

I am a working mother, and when I work, my daughter Cecilia comes with me. Three days a week she and I make the trek to WATER, sometimes by car, sometimes via subway and stroller. Cecilia has learned to say "bagel" as soon as we exit the subway so there is inevitably a detour to one shop before we actually get to the office.

Cecilia has accompanied me to WATER since she was three months old. Now at seventeen months she regards it as her second home, indeed as we climb the steps she says "home." Aunts Mary (Hunt) and Diann (Neu) and Grandma Carol (Scinto) are the main attraction for her. Close behind are the fax machine which spits out paper for her to pick up, the copy machine with a button she has learned to push, and the children's book shelf.

The main draw for me is being with Cecilia while she is young, caring for her myself (along with the help of others in the office) and raising her in an environment where all are valued, no matter their age, orientation or odor.

It is not always easy to have a child at work. Our open doors must sometimes close for conference calls, therapy or to meet a deadline. Like mothers at home, sometimes all of us must let the office housekeeping wait. A visitor to the office sees first-hand what having a child can be like, if she doesn't know already. Cheerios and cracker crumbs cover the floor more often than not and there are frequently books and toys strewn under desks and chairs. A fussy child at home is a challenge; at work she can feel like an impediment.

Learning to be a mother while others watch has been stretching at times. There is no need to put up the supermom facade when there is nowhere to hide. When my patience wears thin or my time feels precious, having nearby an experienced mother who has raised four daughters (Carol) is a gift. At other times stopping to read Cecilia a book is the most important work that can be done. It enables us both to get back to "work." Seeing others in the office (as well as our many visitors) interact with Cecilia has also been a joy. Her community of caring adults is wide and she knows she is loved. I see first hand what village child-rearing can look like.

It remains to be seen how long this experiment will work. When Cecilia was born the invitation was extended to bring her to the office but no one knew what to expect. Each developmental step along the way we have wondered how much further to go. As is often the case in trying to simplify life, the result is not always easier, but it is rewarding. As a mother I highly recommend it. As for the others here, you'll have to ask their points of view!

Editor's Note: Mary says, "WATER has never been more fun." Diann says, "Smells, bells and hugs have all new meanings." Carol says, "Better for the heart than low fat and aerobics!"

Cynthia (Cindy) is on duty at WATER three days a week, managing the office and handling programs; she's on duty at mothering seven days (and nights) a week.

Sisters Inside

Gloria Killian at the California Institution for Women is an incarcerated woman who uses her considerable talent to advocate for women imprisoned for killing their abusers. She will be released shortly to continue her important work outside. But she urges WATER supporters to write to their local elected officials to let them know of support for clemency and/or parole release for women who have been battered by men they later killed.

"Prior to 1992," she reports, "California law did not permit evidence of domestic violence to be introduced during the trial of a woman who had killed her abuser. Despite the fact that many of these men died during acute battering incidents, which they had initiated, and during which they were trying to kill the woman, evidence of domestic violence was not allowed." Although there have been changes in the law, she notes, the defense is still often contingent upon the discretion of the judge.

In her powerful poem "Forget Me Not," Gloria writes:

We are incarcerated women:

We are the forgotten, the marginalized,
the dispossessed, the abandoned

The disposable refuse of a throw-away society

...

Women who were helped to rehabilitate
themselves

Will teach their children

To recover from their wounds

To be strong

To be kind

To rise above their circumstances

Bitterness or blessing

The choice is yours

WE ARE YOUR FUTURE

WATER urges you to follow Gloria's suggestion and write now.



Resources

Barchers, Suzanne I. **WISE WOMEN: FOLK AND FAIRY TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD.** Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press/ Libraries Unlimited, 1996 (324 pages, \$21).

Women are heroic in the service of their communities in this global collection.

Davis, Patricia H. **COUNSELING ADOLESCENT GIRLS.** Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996 (112 pages, \$11).

A good first step for pastoral professionals and parents to understand and apply new insights about young women in patriarchy.

Eiseland, Nancy L. **THE DISABLED GOD: TOWARD A LIBERATORY THEOLOGY OF DISABILITY.** Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994 (139 pages, \$13.95).

A "must" for every theological book shelf, this challenging and creative book opens an important new field.

Finson, Shelley Davis. **A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY.** Ontario: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, CRIAW Papers, No. 34. 1995 (99 pages, \$5).

A basic overview of an important field.

Fischer, Clare B. **OF SPIRITUALITY: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE.** Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995 (299 pages, \$49.50).

The summaries for each section and the selections themselves show the author's broad and deep knowledge of the subject. A must for libraries; a great aid for comprehensive exams.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria & Fernando F. Segovia, Eds. **HISPANIC/LATINO THEOLOGY: CHALLENGE AND PROMISE.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996 (382 pages, \$25).

Important new essays that prove the editors' point that Hispanic/Latino theology is a mature movement making a signal contribution to the field.

Jay, Karla, Ed. **DYKE LIFE: A CELEBRATION OF THE LESBIAN EXPERIENCE FROM GROWING UP TO GROWING OLD.** New York: HarperCollins, 1995 (374 pages, \$14).

A primer for those who want to know what contemporary lesbian life is like, though oddly, the book is devoid of any significant work in religion.

Neuger, Christine Cozad. **THE ARTS OF MINISTRY.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996 (211 pages, \$21.99).

A variety of voices and topics combine to provide a helpful overview of the field.

Poling, James Newton. **DELIVER US FROM EVIL: RESISTING RACIAL AND GENDER OPPRESSION.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996 (220 pages, \$15).

A useful effort to demonstrate the holy imperative of resisting evil.

Rich, Adrienne. **DARK FIELDS OF THE REPUBLIC: POEMS 1991-1995.** New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995 (79 pages, \$25). Audio Tape included.

Treat yourself. This is a jewel.

Reimer, Ivoni Richter. **WOMEN IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: A FEMINIST LIBERATION PERSPECTIVE.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995 (302 pages, \$24).

Hard questions about important texts enrich our knowledge of women in the early church.

Rodriguez, Jeanette. **STORIES WE LIVE, CUENTOS QUE VIVIMOS: HISPANIC WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY.** New York: Paulist Press, 1996 (88 pages, \$5.95).

A gentle read of women's stories and what they might mean about the divine.

Rudy, Kathy. **BEYOND PRO-LIFE AND PRO-CHOICE: MORAL DIVERSITY IN THE ABORTION DEBATE.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1996 (224 pages, \$23).

A well written feminist appeal for the repeal of abortion laws and the beginning of community-based decision making.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. **WOMAN-GUIDES: READINGS TOWARD A FEMINIST THEOLOGY.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, 1996 (274 pages, \$15).

In a new preface to this classic, Rosemary Ruether lays out her understanding of canon.

Russell, Letty M. & J. Shannon Clarkson, Eds. **DICTIONARY OF FEMINIST THEOLOGIES.** Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996 (351 pages, \$39).

A good dictionary is crucial to critical work in religion. Start with this one, designed to invite dialogue rather than give definitive answers.

Sanders, Cheryl J. **EMPOWERMENT ETHICS FOR A LIBERATED PEOPLE: A PATH TO AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995. (141 pages, \$12).

With her forward looking ethics for African American communities, Dr. Sanders provides food for thought for all.

Saussy, Carroll. **THE GIFT OF ANGER: A CALL TO FAITHFUL ACTION.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995 (160 pages, \$17).

Read it to discover the ins and outs of anger, your own and others', and how to apply such knowledge. A pastoral counseling approach for more than pastoral counselors.

Schmidt, Frederick W. **A STILL SMALL VOICE: WOMEN, ORDINATION, AND THE CHURCH.** New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996 (194 pages, \$19.95).

The impact of women's ordinations is being felt in churches around the world. The author investigates several to begin an analysis of what it means.

Stuart, Elizabeth. **JUST GOOD FRIENDS: TOWARDS A LESBIAN AND GAY THEOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS.** London: Mowbray, 1995 (280 pages, 9.99 pounds)

In an insightful contribution to an important subject, Stuart picks up where others have left off to explore friendship as a central relationship for theo-ethical understandings. Brava.

Tigert, Leanne McCall. **COMING OUT WHILE STAYING IN: STRUGGLES AND CELEBRATIONS OF LESBIANS, GAYS, AND BISEXUALS IN THE CHURCH.** Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996 (176 pages, \$14.95).

A tough thing to do with integrity; this book outlines one person's approach.

Voelkel-Haugen, Rebecca and Marie M. Fortune. **SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION: A COURSE OF STUDY FOR TEENAGERS.** Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996 (34 pages, \$8.95).

Every congregation needs this resource to do the work of safety and justice for its youth.

Weiss, Penny A. and Marilyn Friedman. **FEMINISM AND COMMUNITY.** Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995 (411 pages, \$19.95).

Community is a feminist watchword, but in this collection one finds concrete articulations of its complexity.

INTERNSHIP Alert: Valuable experiences and on-the-job training await self-motivated students. WATER welcomes younger colleagues who seek insights and practice of feminist theology and spirituality during their school term or for a summer period.

Our "graduates" express great satisfaction that their experiences were shaped to their needs. They rave about the people they've met, the network around the globe to which they now belong, the sense of making a difference that comes from working hard with a dedicated team.

Some have focused on feminist liturgies, some on girls' spirituality, others on feminist communities, others on feminist ethical issues. Each has been immersed in the life and spirit of WATER and the broader community of DC.

Of course they recall all the bulk mailings and phone calls, the xeroxing and filing, but somehow those daily tasks take on a different value when interspersed with rich conversation, fast-paced thinking and attentive living.

If you would like to intern at an agency that works on feminist issues in religion, call 301/589-2509, FAX 301/589-3150, E-mail: [water@](mailto:water@hers.com)

News and Notes



[hers.com](mailto:water@hers.com) or write to WATER, 8035 13th Street, Silver Spring MD 20910.

WATER On-line: WATER's e-mail list continues to grow. More important, it continues to be a great way for colleagues to stay connected, share information and build the Alliance. Feel free to join.

Keeping up with technology is a challenge. Here's the latest: If you want to subscribe, send a message to majordomo@hers.com with the words "subscribe water-l" in the body of the message. To un-subscribe, send the message to

majordomo@hers.com with the words "unsubscribe water-l" in the body. If you wish a digest version of the list, simply send the message to majordomo@hers.com with the words "subscribe water-l digest" in the body. If you need help, send a message to majordomo@hers.com with the word "help" in the body.

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WATER Office is at water@hers.com

WATER List (this means to 250+ people so be sure you want all of them to get your message) is at water-l@hers.com

WATER Web page is at <http://www.hers.com/water>

See you in cyberspace!

WANTED: The WATER office is in need of a **rocking chair** and a **child's desk** to complete our all-ages accommodations. If you, or someone you know, has one or the other to donate, please give us a call. We will all bless you, Cecilia especially. Our phone number is 301/589-2509.



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