

waterwheel

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

Ten Years of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network

By Mary E. Hunt

Most good ideas start small and grow steadily. Such has been the trajectory of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network. When Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and I imagined it ten years ago, we realized that no such network existed in North America even though such groups were already meeting in other parts of the world. As a result, we were not linked in any formal way to colleagues who share our commitment to create "a global network of women who publicly and with enthusiasm embrace their work as feminist liberation theologians." It is a good thing Elisabeth and I are not afraid to fail as we invariably set lofty goals for ourselves!

The Network met for the first time in November 1995, in conjunction with the Women's Ordination Conference 20th Anniversary Gathering in Crystal City, VA,

Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature to look at an issue or discuss a topic. Presentations are short so as to maximize interaction. The door is open to all who wish to attend, with usually 30-50 in attendance. One feature of the meetings is a chance to hear a short introduction from each person, a process that conveys a sense of what is happening around the world.

Over the years, we have looked at the North American theological scene (1997), heard updates from feminist groups in Costa Rica and Europe (1998), met at the Bunting Institute, and hosted a reception with the Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society group and the Women's Caucus (1999). A small group met for four days of "Study, Sun and Solidarity" in Florida (2000), a good chance to deepen connections and analysis.

Most good ideas start small and grow steadily.

suburban Washington, DC. Many colleagues who could not be there sent letters (remember those?) and emails indicating the need for such a group. We concurred and insisted that the Network would: 1) include both U.S. and Canadian participants; 2) prioritize racial/ethnic and religious diversity both in membership and in its collaboration with other groups; 3) shape discussion in a globalized perspective; 4) build its agenda based on the priorities of the group.

Network members include women and men who are students, professors, activists, ministers, politicians, and others who share the goal of doing feminist liberation theology in the service of social justice. We meet each fall at the Annual Meeting of the American

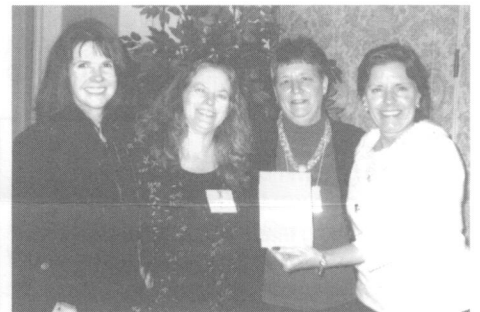
At other meetings we have looked at "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally" (2001), which was published in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Spring 2002, Vol. 18, No. 1, <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/jfsr/>. We took on economics and feminist theology (2002), and held a memorable discussion on feminist pedagogy (2003). Presentations at last year's panel on nationalism (2004) were published as a Roundtable in the *JFSR*, Spring 2005, Volume 21, Number 1. We have succeeded in doing our work and making it available for a wider audience.

At our tenth anniversary session, we heard from four representatives of other such groups around the world, bringing us closer

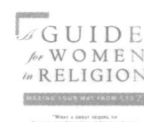
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The Women's Caucus of the American Academy of Religion celebrates A Guide for Women in Religion: Making Your Way from A to Z. (l. to r.) Harriet Luckman, Laurie Wright Garry, Mary E. Hunt, Paula Timble-Familetti.



A Guide for Women in Religion: Making Your Way from A to Z Edited by Mary E. Hunt

An indispensable resource. This work reflects the multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-disciplinary nature of the field. It is designed to encourage creative, collaborative approaches, and to help women avoid being coopted. *A Guide for Women in Religion* offers guidance on how to handle graduate school, dissertation writing, job interviews, promotions, resumes, health care, retirement, on-line teaching, publications, and much more. (Palgrave) Order from WATER, \$16.

Contributors: Rebecca Alpert, Karen Baker-Fletcher, Valerie E. Dixon, Mary E. Hunt, Janet R. Jakobsen, Rosamond C. Rodman, Katarina Von Kellenbach



Editorial

One holiday well-wisher wrote, "Take a break from saving the world—kick up your heels and have a fun time." Her message has its own wisdom, despite the equally compelling message of another holiday greeter who observed that the list of good things for which to be grateful was short while the list of moral horrors lengthened daily. Where is the balance? How do we hold it all together?

As if war were not enough, the allegation that the U.S. government sanctions torture, allows domestic spying, and moves prisoners to secret locations, all in the name of anti-terrorism, is chilling indeed. But it should not surprise.

This is a government that realized that 21st century warfare would result in devastating injuries including many amputations. So it set up special services at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, down the street from the WATER office, in anticipation of the many young Americans who have survived the war, but will live with its ugly reminders for the rest of their lives. This is a cruel fate for the cyber generation whose on-screen warfare is nothing like the real thing.

This season we had the privilege of housing the loved one of an injured soldier who is rehabbing at Walter Reed after devastating injuries. It was a chance to connect with the goodness of people who are caught in a system they did not design. In the present economy, military service is one ticket to higher education, one way to have a job that pays every two weeks, a chance to serve one's country. We regret that the military is many people's best option, and pledge to create others.

Meanwhile, there are anti-war protests every Friday night in front of Walter Reed. And there are families inside who need hope and hospitality as they and their loved ones mend from the ravages of combat. Doing both—protesting and hugging—is one way to find the balance, hold it all together until better days arrive.

But we also need to give thanks and be proud of the fact that we have extended our connections this far in a decade, as we commit to deepening our links in the decade ahead.

Ten Years...

(Continued from page 1)

still to our original goal of participating in a global network. Elaine Wainwright from Australia, now Head of the School of Theology at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, is a founding member of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology of the Asia/Pacific Region (WSRT). Her helpful remarks on the struggles and successes of women's groups in the region were at the same time unique and familiar. Their journal, *Sea Changes: Journal of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology* (<http://www.wsrt.com.au/seachanges/index.shtml>), is an innovative project that reaches a broad audience.

Andre Musskopf reported on the many activities of the Nucleo de Pesquisa de Genero (npg@est.com.br), a gender research group in Sao Leopoldo, Brasil. He highlighted the group's activities during the 2005 World Social Forum, especially the World Forum on Theology and Liberation. He also discussed the 10th Statewide Feminist Theology Meeting which celebrated 15 years of women in theological education at the local Lutheran seminary and 30 years since the ordination of the first women in the Lutheran Church in Brasil. Andre's own work on gay and lesbian issues is also part of the exciting mix in Brasil.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Professor at the University of San Diego, spoke as president of Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women (www.sakyadhita.org/). It is the first organization to link Buddhist women internationally for scholarship, practice, and activism. She described conferences where unlearning racism and homophobia were part of the Buddhist feminist agenda. She also made a point, echoed in so many groups, that

funding the infrastructure of such organizations is no easy task.

Susanne Scholz, associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Merrimack College, is a member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (http://www.eswtr.org/home_e.html). The ESWTR, founded in 1986, holds a major conference every two years. The most recent one, "Building Bridges in a Multifaceted Europe: Religious Origins, Traditions, Contexts and Identities," was in Hungary. National and regional groups work in between conferences. A number of yearbooks have been published, for example, *Holy Texts: Authority and Language*, in 2004. The North American section of the ESWTR meets at the AAR/SBL with panels such as this year's fascinating offering on "Religion and Sexuality in the Public Discourse in Europe and the USA."

These presentations and the discussion that ensued move us closer to developing a network adequate to our needs. We need a well developed Web site and listserve, as well as links to each of the groups named above and more. We need to raise funds to support the Network. We need to envision how it can function to further the needs of colleagues, especially in countries where resources are lacking. But we also need to give thanks and be proud of the fact that we have extended our connections this far in a decade, as we commit to deepening our links in the decade ahead.

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., is cofounder and codirector of WATER, mhunt@hers.com



(l. to r.) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary E. Hunt at WATER planning next steps!

The Vatican has released a document banning priests "who are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called 'gay culture.'" Rome has been floating trial balloons for some time about this document to see what level of anti-gay rhetoric it can get away with. After months of document leaks, the Vatican had already made its point: local bishops and religious superiors will be expected to scrutinize seminaries lest they become hideaways of gay culture. At this point the actual text of the document is irrelevant: dictatorships always rely more on self-censorship through fear and intimidation than actual punishment to accomplish their goals.

archdiocese — where the incidences of sexual abuse by priests were among the highest — finds that nearly 60 percent of Catholics oppose a ban on gay priests. Combine this with American Catholics' clear disregard for the church's medieval views on marriage, divorce, and birth control, and increasing numbers of Catholics who support abortion under certain circumstances, and it becomes obvious that Americans find themselves in a church that does not speak to their everyday concerns in any meaningful way.

The Vatican, in its patriarchal echo chamber, continues to portray Western values of tolerance and equality as the fallen morality of a

terrible cruelty and injustice."

The Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of Catholic feminist groups, clarified that "All ministers, indeed all members, are called to be responsible agents of their own sexuality" and pledged themselves "to create communities in which all persons can love and be loved openly as is their birthright. Anything less is simply not Catholic."

And ultimately, as Catholics face their Stonewall moment, where the choice to submit means a choice to violate one's conscience, this is what it comes down to: the meaning of the word 'catholic.' 'Catholic' means all-encompassing, universal, comprehensive.

American Catholics: Time for a Stonewall Moment

By Mary E. Hunt

The galling fact is, this document, while purporting to 'clarify' church teaching or 'purify' the priesthood, is really nothing more than an effort to link the criminal activity of pedophile priests with homosexuality, and to distract from the reprehensible behavior of bishops who covered up their misconduct. This is an absurd gambit on the part of the Vatican; homosexuality has no relationship to child sex abuse. This scandal has made transparent an untenable 'kyriarchal' system — a model of church that locates power, both sacramental and temporal, in the hands of a few men who literally 'lord' over the laity, speaking and acting in the name of all believers when in fact they are but a tiny percentage of the community.

It is time for a Stonewall moment.

The Stonewall was a gay bar in New York where, in 1969, patrons resisted arrest during one of the police's regular gay-bashing raids. Rather than acquiesce to the harassment that kept up a neurotic minuet between police and bar patrons, courageous lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people stood up, spoke out, and resisted. They probably surprised even themselves at the power of their own righteous indignation.

Catholics should respond to the latest Vatican bullying the same way. After decades of the Vatican implementing a system that takes authority away from local communities and presumes to impose its will on Catholics who can think for themselves, it is time for Catholics to stand up, speak out, and resist.

Evidence suggests that American Catholics do not support many of the narrow-minded tenets of their church. In opposition to the male hierarchy's belief that ordaining women priests is theological treason, more than 60 percent of American Catholics say they would support women in the priesthood, according to the most recent Zogby/LeMoyne poll. Another poll conducted by the *Boston Globe* in the Boston

secular society. In so doing, the institutional church treats millions of faithful Catholics in America not as spiritual adults, but as perpetual adolescents in need of discipline. The time has come for American Catholics to claim their full baptismal citizenship and publicly call for changes in church policies on sexuality, ordination and relationships. Considering the enormous economic and political influence of the American church, if Catholics here really stood up to their bishops, loudly and in numbers, the Vatican would have little choice but to listen.

There is evidence that despite the dissembling of the hierarchy, American Catholics are refusing to let the institution scapegoat gay priests, feminism, and modernity for the Vatican's sins.

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the leaders of the U.S. men's religious orders, recently said it would send a delegation to Rome to oppose the anti-gay seminary policy. In a welcome response to an inflexible Vatican regime, the superior of the New York Province of the Jesuits, Fr. Gerald J. Chojnacki, wrote: "We know that gay men...have served the church well as priests — and so why would we be asked to discriminate based on orientation alone against those whom God has called and invited?" This is a question that could be asked about women and married men as well.

Thomas Gumbleton, Detroit's auxiliary bishop, issued this call to action in a recent sermon: "When authorities in our church say one thing and then act in a different way, it seems to me that we're called to challenge that, to speak out if necessary to try to counter-act what our religious authorities do." He went on to confront the Vatican with the teaching of U.S. bishops, which says that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are "always our children." "They say one thing, 'In you God's love is revealed,' but then say, 'You're not worthy to be in the seminary.' It is

'Catholic' does not mean exclusion from the community on the basis of misinformed or capricious reasoning. This message of universal inclusion was the lesson of the first Stonewall. It is still being learned by society as a whole. The Gospel message of love and justice is reason to hope Catholics will be quicker on the uptake.

In Memory of Her

From Renate Rose, HI: In memory of **Edith Wolfe**, beloved friend, a true follower of Jesus, relentless in her care for the poor and outcast, working for peace and justice all her 83 years.

From Nancy Ruth Best, NC: In honor of **Dr. Carroll Saussy**.

From Virginia Day, GA: In memory of **Agnes Mary Mansour**, RIP, Dec. 17, 2004.

From Holly Fox Sundquist, MA: In memory of **Kathy Paquette**.

From Liz Thoman, CA: In memory of **Gertrude Roberson Thoman** (d. May 8, 2004) whose 91 years was a daily testament to family, hospitality and common sense. She embraced Vatican II as long overdue and became the rock of the Community of Christian Unity, an alternative parish in the diocese of Nashville, for over 20 years.

From Madeline Jervis, VA: In honor of **Elizabeth L. Wildhack**.

From WATER, MD: In memory of wise women colleagues who have died: **Mary Imelda Buckley, Maria Harris, Patty Crowley, and Betty Carroll, RSM.**

Women with breast cancer have contacted WATER to ask for blessings and liturgies to aid them on their cancer journeys. In response to their calls, we are creating a series of liturgies and ritual, blessings and prayers designed to mark some of the common experiences of women with breast cancer. If you would like to be part of this project, contact Diann Neu, dneu@hers.com. This liturgy was celebrated during Breast Cancer Awareness Month in Greater Washington, DC.

Preparation

Place an altar table in the center of a circle of chairs and cover it with a cloth. Arrange on it a pink candle, iron pot with tea candle inside, matches, basket of pink strips of paper and pens, bowl for water, pitcher of water, basket of stones, basket of seed ribbons, drum, and a Zen bell. Invite four women to lead, six to read the Litany of Remembrance, and twelve to read quotes from women survivors. If your group is small, invite some to take two parts.

Centering Prayer

Leader 1: (Create the sacred space by walking around the altar, drumming, and inviting the gathered to breathe deeply, and visualize water flowing over them like a waterfall.)

Call to Gather

Leader 2: (Light the candle.) We gather to be one with all who have or have had breast cancer, their friends, colleagues, and loved ones. We gather for "A Ceremony of Memory and Hope: A Feminist Interfaith Ritual of Remembrance, Healing, and Empowerment."

Circle Introductions

Leader 1: Share your name and why you came. We will respond, "Welcome, (name)."

Calling on the Ancestors

(Leader 1 faces East and chimes the Zen bell.)
Spirit of the East, Kwan Yin,
Filled with the winds of the air cycle,
Breathing life in and out again,
Come, be with us here.

(Leader 2 faces South and lights a candle.)
Spirit of the South, Shakti,
Filled with the metabolism of the fire cycle,
Producing energy to warm cold bodies,
Come, be with us here.

(Leader 3 faces West, takes the pitcher, and pours water into the bowl.)
Spirit of the West, Yemoja,
Filled with the flow of the water cycle,
Cleansing in and through and out of you,
Come, be with us here.

(Leader 4 faces North and touches the stones and seed ribbons.)

Spirit of the North, Bridget,
Filled with the creation of the earth cycle,
Producing food to nourish and heal,
Come, be with us here.

Litany of Remembrance

Leader 3: Surrounded by the Spirits of Life, let us remember brave and courageous women with breast cancer whose lives have affected ours. (Six women read. After each name, Leader 2 sounds the Zen bell.)

One: Barbara, best friend from childhood, divorced, remarried, mother of two daughters, died of breast cancer October 1986 in Indiana.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Two: Joey, colleague, former Associate Pastor of Christ Congregational Church in Silver Spring, MD, mother of two daughters, died after finishing chemotherapy.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Three: Barbara Rosenblum, sociologist, Jewish, co-author of *Cancer in Two Voices*, died of breast cancer August 1988.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Four: Sister Margaret, whose funeral WATER helped plan, died of breast cancer in 2005.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Five: Mary-Helen Mautner, inspiration for Mautner Project, The National Lesbian Health Organization, died of breast cancer in Washington, DC, August 1982.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Six: Audre Lorde, poet laureate of New York State in 1991, influential black writer on feminist, racial, lesbian, and sexual issues, died of breast cancer November 17, 1992.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Leader 3: Let us name the women we know who have died of breast cancer.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Leader 3: Women who will die today of breast cancer.

All: We remember you. (Sound the bell.)

Song: "How Can I Keep from Singing," early Quaker song, American gospel tune, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, c. 1993.

My life flows on with endless song above earth's lamentations. I hear the real though far off hymn that sounds the new creation.

Refrain: No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock I'm clinging. Since love echoes through my soul, how can I keep from singing.

Listen to Women Survivors

Reader 1: My world turned upside down at 7:00 on the morning of March 8 as I stood in the shower. A lump in the breast. A moment of panic. So begins a journey that every woman fears.

—Susanna, health care provider

Reader 2: My cancer scare changed my life. I'm grateful for every new, healthy day I have. It has helped me prioritize my life.

—Olivia Newton-John, singer

Reader 3: Cancer wakes you up, and you say, "There must be more out there to life. I wonder what that is."

—Jill Eikenberry, actress

Reader 4: The moment I found my lump in the bathtub, I knew it was cancer. I thought breast cancer was a death sentence. I didn't know that most women who get breast cancer live a long life. But you know, the woman I was two years ago died. And the real me was born.

—Claire, mother

A Ceremony of Memory A Feminist Interfaith Ritual Healing, and Empowerment

By Diann L. Neu in collaboration with
Ami Gaston and Amy L. Neu

Chant: I am a woman & I love my spirit, I am a woman & I love my body, Beauty above me, Beauty below me, Beauty all around me – Aiy!

Reader 5: An individual doesn't get cancer, a family does.

—Terry Tempest Williams

Reader 6: Your first emotion isn't "Am I going to lose my breast?" It's "Am I going to lose my life?"

—Linda Ellerbee, TV reporter

Reader 7: It's all right to cry, but not for too long. I made it, and so can you.

—Betty Ford, former First Lady

Reader 8: But I've been writing letters, making phone calls, "announcing" my condition to the world: Bill in San Francisco, Lilian Mohin in London, Marie-Genevieve and Catherine, Edmund and Hubert, Gail in Paris. Genevieve's sister died of breast cancer; Odile's sister-in-law is dying of metastasized breast cancer, which makes me reluctant to call or write to each of them. But I want "everyone" to know—as if their affection and good wishes would keep me safe. And closer to them all.

—Marilyn Hacker

Chant: I am a woman...

Reader 9: As soon as I am able to touch it, I resolve to caress this flatness. My chest, my dead-feeling armpit, my arm, all that

remains. I run my fingers over the area, petting it, caressing it, letting it know that I am not angry, that it is still my body, that I still love it. I tell a friend that I am doing this, caressing the place where there is no longer a breast, for which there is no name. I press my fingers gently all around the scar, I squeeze my armpit. My friend is surprised. But if I cannot love my body, I cannot heal.

—Alicia Ostriker

Reader 10: What does it mean to say I have survived until you take the mirrors and turn them outward and read your own face in their outraged light?

—Adrienne Rich, poet

Memory and Hope: Ritual of Remembrance, Empowerment Celebration with Ginger Luke, Amari Pearson-Fields

Reader 11: Living a self-conscious life, under the pressure of time, I work with the consciousness of death at my shoulder, not constantly, but often enough to leave a mark upon all of my life's decisions and actions. And it does not matter whether this death comes next week or thirty years from now; this consciousness gives my life another breadth. It helps shape the words I speak, the ways I love, my politic of action, the strength of my vision and purpose, the depth of my appreciation of living.

—Audre Lorde, poet

Reader 12: ...with one breast or none, I am still me. The sum total of me is infinitely greater than the number of my breasts.

—Alice Walker, author

Song: "How Can I Keep from Singing"

Lamentation

Leader 2: There are so many things in our lives that no longer serve us. They are baggage that gets in the way of our true self. Let us release fear, pain, anger, addiction, or whatever needs to be cast off. Write one or several on a piece of paper. When you are finished writing, come forward, read your paper if you wish, and burn it.

Fire Chant

Reflection and Sharing

Leader 2: We want to take time now to reflect on and share the rituals that give hope and

courage to women with breast cancer, their families, friends, and communities.

Think now of the rituals or prayers you or friends have done, for example, when examining your breasts, getting a mammogram, feeling a lump, getting chemo, losing hair, honoring an anniversary, rituals for any part of the breast cancer journey. Let us share glimpses of these rituals to give one another hope.

Water Chant

Blessing with Water

Leader 2: In the center of our table is a bowl of water representing a sacred well. Holy wells through the ages have been believed to have healing powers that cure ailments. Water is a healing and regenerative force. It facilitates life. It is spoken of as the source, the healer, the transformer, the spring of ancient wisdom. Look at the well and visualize the healing powers of the water, and your healing powers. Touch the water with your hands (*pause*), then touch your hands, saying:

Bless my hands that I may touch gracefully.

Touch your eyes, saying:

Bless my eyes that I may see clearly.

Touch your ears, saying:

Bless my ears that I may listen to the words of loved ones.

Touch your mouth, saying:

Bless my mouth that I may speak words of healing.

Touch your heart, saying:

Bless my heart that I may love tenderly.

Touch your breasts, or where your breasts used to be, saying:

Bless my breasts, or where they used to be, that I may love myself.

Touch your feet, saying:

Bless my feet that I may walk courageously.

Touch your whole body, saying:

Bless my body that I may be filled with life.

Stones of Solidarity

Leader 3: In Celtic mythology, stones have healing qualities. They activate the power of holy wells. Take a stone from around the well to symbolize your healing powers and the healing powers of this community. (*Each takes a stone*)

One in every eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime. I put this stone in the water for every woman who hears the words: "You have breast cancer." Spirit of Life, give her strength to face the unknown, patience to go through the tests, and courage to make the decisions that are best for her.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 4: For every woman with breast cancer, there are family and friends who are shocked and grieving. I put this stone in the water for all

mothers and fathers, partners and husbands, children and siblings, friends and colleagues who wait and watch. Holy One on the Journey, give them strength to be with their loved one.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 1: Early detection is the best protection. I put this stone in the water for all involved in cancer research whose life and work make early detection, careful diagnosis, and the hope of healing possible. God of Many Names, guide their minds to discover the ways of cancer.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 2: The days of treatment are so long, the chemotherapy and radiation so scary, the face in the mirror is so strange. I put this stone in the water for all women who fight the exhaustion, the fear, the loss of hair and appetite; for women who fight back, who stay the course, and look fear in the face with courage and even with humor. Holy One of Courage and Laughter, be near.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 3: Faith, prayer, and community are sources of help and healing. I put this stone in the water for all the prayers and visits, the phone calls and cards, the food and kind acts that bring comfort and healing. Holy One of Hospitality, surround us with community.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 4: There will be a cure; there must be a cure! I put this stone in the water for all who believe in and work toward the day when breast cancer does not take the lives of women. Divine Healer, send your healing spirit to bring a cure for breast cancer now.

ALL: We are here with you; you are not alone.

Leader 3: Put a stone in the water and say, "I am here with you; you are not alone."

Greeting of Peace

Leader 2: (*Hold a seed ribbon.*) This ribbon is embedded with forget-me-not seeds. I invite you to plant it in memory of someone who has transitioned.

Let us close our time together by offering one another a greeting of peace and exchanging our seed ribbons with one another as a sign of solidarity in the struggle to overcome breast cancer. Let us send one another forth, exchanging the ribbons and saying: "Peace and healing be with you." (*Exchanging ribbons*)

Diann L. Neu, D.Min., MSW, of WATER;
Rev. Ginger Luke of River Road Unitarian
Church; Ami Gaston and Amari Pearson-Fields
of The Mautner Project.



Rest in Peace, Rosa Parks!

By Barbara Cullom

This is an eye-witness account of waiting in line to view the coffin of Miss Rosa Parks in the U.S. Capitol on October 30, 2005. I daresay the Capitol never looked better. May Miss Parks' memory inspire us.

Dear Friends,

I was in the longest line I have ever been in on the National Mall in Washington, DC, waiting with thousands of others to pay my respects to Rosa Parks. She is one of the heroes in my life. I was unable to attend the honorings of Dr. Martin Luther King or Robert Kennedy, and I still regret not being able to be there. So I was not going to miss this.

At 2:00 a.m., when my six hours of waiting entitled me to twenty seconds in the Rotunda of the Capitol where Ms. Parks' casket was, that place was not full of white men in power suits with power ties. The Rotunda held African American women and men, babies, toddlers, elementary school youngsters and teenagers, young adults and a scattering of white folks. I got to know the seven or so people standing with me and my friend Louise over the course of the six hour wait.

One was a middle-aged man who drove from his mother's home in Pennsylvania to get to D.C. so he could wait for six hours. There was a K-6 principal from Prince Georges County, MD, with her two teenaged daughters. The young women amused themselves (and us) by making a *cinema verite* recording of the lines, complete with a running commentary about the temperature, the location in "the middle of nowhere," and the description of the tens of thousands who waited. There were three African American women, two middle aged sisters and their senior mother.

The end of the line began on Constitution Avenue east of the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art. It snaked westward to 5th Street, along 5th onto the National Mall where it then made its way down past the East and West wings of the National Gallery of Art, across the Mall toward the Air and Space

Museum, back eastward to the open area in front of the National Museum of the American Indian, where a bank-teller-like line zig-zagged about ten times to the Reflecting Pool across from the Conservatory (and several sleepless and annoyed resident mallards), along the south side area in front of the west facade of the Capitol, to another "maze" leading to the security area with its metal detectors and x-rays, along the south side stairs up into the Capitol and through the Rotunda, where the casket lay.

Several things impressed me:

- . The orderliness of the waiting folks. Some groups sang "movement songs," but most just waited and followed the yellow "Police line do not cross" tape and the snow fences.
- . The ways people got to know their neighbors, sharing (very) uncomplimentary views of the current president and administration, memories of Civil Rights, Anti-War, Women's Rights, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual and Transgender Rights marches, the Million Man, Million Mom and Million More marches.
- . The way people shared their memories of Rosa Parks and how her "standing up for her rights by sitting down" changed their lives.
- . How many folks held plain black and white signs that simply read "Thank you, Rosa Parks."
- . The fact that so few people left. Most people hung on, fueled by hearsay that Metro trains and buses would run all night.
- . The fact that almost no one complained about the length of lines, the cooling night air, and how much waiting and standing were invested in gaining twenty seconds to cross the Rotunda and go back into the chilly night. Children slept in their parents' arms, or hoisted on their backs. Teenagers talked on cell phones for a while and then were quiet.
- . The fact that Park Police, Capitol Police, and anyone keeping order seemed calm and unworried about the long lines gradually becoming impatient, argumentative or upset. It seemed like all of us were in this together,

honored to be able to look at the casket that held the remains of a woman who changed the world.

. And finally, how small the casket seemed, given the size of Sister Rosa's soul.

When I got to the Rotunda, I blew Miss Rosa a kiss and thanked her in my heart for changing my life too. I was a skinny seven-year-old in an all-white part of New Jersey in a family of uncritical racists who seemed to never stop to wonder if everything they had been told about "Negroes" was true. But her singular action was the first chink in the unbroken wall of racial prejudice for me. And even a seven-year-old could appreciate the fact that if you were tired, you just naturally wanted to sit on a bus.

Maybe it was that my vigil, my pilgrimage, took place in the night. Maybe it was that the temperature was neither hot nor cold, or that the stars were out. Maybe it was being on the brink of Halloween, almost All Saint's Day. Maybe it was the legacy in the blood of my Celtic ancestors who knew that in late October, on the fire feast of Samhain, the Dead cross the Bridge of Swords for a night and walk the earth, revisiting old places, looking with spirit eyes on the beloved living. I almost thought I saw a quiet, bespectacled seamstress waiting for a bus, get on, and drop gratefully into a seat.

The day after Ms. Parks died, the editorial cartoon in the *Washington Post* showed a seamstress standing before an angel at the Pearly Gates. The angel addressed her: "Rosa Parks... Yes, we have something in the front row just for you. We've been holding it open since 1955."

Enjoy the view from the front row, Miss Rosa. And keep a seat open for each of us when it comes our time to board.

Barbara Cullom, Ph.D., is Adjunct Professor of Theology at Goucher College in Baltimore, MD, and longtime WATER colleague.

Atlee-Loudon, Jennifer. **RED THREAD: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF ACCOMPANIMENT, TRAUMA AND HEALING.** Washington, DC: EPICA Books, 2001 (159 pages, \$13.95).

A powerful read by a woman who staked her life with the Nicaraguan people during the Contra war. It is painful to recall what suffering ensued, but instructive for preventing it in the future.

Dempsey, Carol J. and Mary Margaret Pazdan, Editors. **EARTH, WIND, & FIRE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CREATION.** Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004 (196 pages, \$21.95).

Creation remains a central religious theme quite apart from the contemporary struggles between science and religion. In fact, it is fundamental to many feminist theological discussions where ecological and biblical materials converge.

Dreyer, Elizabeth A. **PASSIONATE SPIRITUALITY: HILDEGARD OF BINGEN AND HADEWIJCH OF BRABANT.** New York: Paulist Press, 2005 (180 pages, \$16.95).

A study in passion, this well-written intro to two mystics opens new paths to embracing life to the fullest. Love of the divine has clear and practical transfer value!

Farley, Margaret A. and Serene Jones, Editors. **LIBERATING ESCHATOLOGY: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF LETTY M. RUSSELL.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999 (261 pages, \$29.95).

Sixteen colleagues, Letty would say "partners," honor feminist theological leader Letty Russell by reflecting on her work and theirs. The theme of liberation eschatology conveys both Letty's commitment to social justice and her deep faith: "We have no guarantee, simply an expectation of faithfulness and love."

Harrison, Beverly Wildung; edited by Elizabeth M. Bounds, Pamela K. Brubaker, Jane E. Hicks, Marilyn J. Legge, Rebecca Todd Peters, and Traci C. West. **JUSTICE IN THE MAKING: FEMINIST SOCIAL ETHICS.** Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. (252 pages, \$24.95).

This innovative format reflects Bev Harrison's view that good ethical reflection is done communally. So these former graduate students of hers wrote

Resources

introductions to various groups of her essays and interviewed her to shed even more light on her insightful body of work.

Kay, Judith W. **MURDERING MYTHS: THE STORY BEHIND THE DEATH PENALTY.** Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005 (209 pages, \$24.95).

Using narrative as a frame for her ethical analysis, Judith Kay offers a fresh look at the death penalty. She argues: "Although the death penalty eventually may be discarded, the story, the practices, and the vices that sustain it will remain." Her book is a refreshing addition to a conversation that drones on while people die.

King, Ursula and Tina Beattie, Editors. **GENDER, RELIGION & DIVERSITY: CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES.** London: Continuum, 2004 (269 pages, \$39.95).

This volume provides a good starting point for understanding how gender and religion are constructed in an increasingly diverse world. Issues ranging from text to anthropology, power to androcentrism, methodology to race are but a few of the topics at hand.

Russell, Letty M., Aruna Gnanadason, and J. Shannon Clarkson, Editors. **WOMEN'S VOICES AND VISIONS OF THE CHURCH: REFLECTIONS FROM NORTH AMERICA.** Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2005 (170 pages, \$15).

After the World Council of Churches' Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, a study process began around the world on women's ways of being church. Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic scholars including Kelly Brown Douglas, Demetra Velisarios Jaquet, Barbara Lundblad, and Mary E. Hunt, among others, spell out the challenges, contradictions, and joys of being part of various models of church, all of which still need to develop active solidarity with women.

Towner-Larsen, Susan. **WITHIN SACRED CIRCLES: MEDITATIONS AND MANDALA QUILTS.** Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004 (142 pages, \$29).

A beautiful book, full of color and meaning and prayer. Treat yourself.

White, Susan J. **A HISTORY OF WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.** Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003 (351 pages, \$30).

Though analysis of some contemporary phenomena such as the women-church movement is spotty at best, and the perspective is "about women" rather than feminist, this book is an attempt to look at where and how women were involved in worship in a variety of settings. It is a helpful step toward telling "the whole" story.

Young, Pamela Dickey. **RE-CREATING THE CHURCH: COMMUNITIES OF EROS.** Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000 (168 pages, \$17).

Feminist approaches to contemporary ecclesiology are welcome additions to the literature. This approach is practical without being naïve about what it will take to change mainstream churches.

For Young People

Mackall, Dandi Daley. **RAINBOW PARTY.** Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002 (10 pages, \$6.99).

Kids love parties, so this book, which teaches "different colors, different friends" through many colors of party-related items, is a winner.

Rylant, Cynthia. **GIVE ME GRACE: A CHILD'S DAYBOOK OF PRAYERS.** New York: Simon & Schuster Books, 1999 (30 pages, \$12).

A sweet prayer book with vivid drawings that are sure to capture children's attention every day of the week.

CDs

Assembly of the Sacred Wheel. **A DREAM WHOSE TIME IS COMING.** Seelie Court, DE: 2001 (21 tracks, 45 mins, \$16).

This CD by The Assembly of the Sacred Wheel, about a Wiccan tradition based in the mid-Atlantic region, is a fundraiser for ASW's New Alexandrian Library Project. Intended to open by 2010, the New Alexandrian Library will provide resources for Pagan, metaphysical, and all spiritual communities. <http://www.sacredwheel.org/nal.html>

Libana, Inc. – Spinning Records. **OUT OF THIS WORLD.** Cambridge, MA: 2004 (15 tracks, 70:46 mins, \$14).

Marvelous chants and songs from around the world make this popular group's most recent offering a welcome one. With Libana the joy of music is contagious.

Videos

MISSING PEACE: WOMEN OF FAITH AND THE FAILURE OF WAR. Woodstock, VT: Old Dog Documentaries, Inc. (VHS/PAL \$19.95, DVD \$34.95, available from PayPal, info@olddogdocumentaries.com, www.olddogdocumentaries.com).

Play this for your group or for your personal enrichment and enter into the faith of six women (2 Jews, 2 Muslims, 2 Christians) who reject fundamentalism and embrace peace. Vibrant, creative, inviting—Chung Hyun Kyung, Azza Karam, and Susanna Heschel, among others, give new content to women's interfaith efforts to create a just world.

ACTING ON FAITH: WOMEN'S NEW RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM IN AMERICA Directed by Rachel Antell, The Pluralism Project, Harvard University, 42 minutes DVD (VHS on request) <http://www.pluralism.org/affiliates/antell/index.php> \$40 including postage. Study guide available at <http://www.pluralism.org/affiliates/antell/index.php>.

A wonderful glimpse into how women from minority faiths are negotiating their way as feminists in American culture. Buddhist, Muslim, and South Asian women are featured. Ideal for a study group or class to spark discussion and respect.

Calendar

THE MYSTIC'S WHEEL OF THE YEAR 2006: A MULTIFAITH CALENDAR REFLECTING ECO-EQUALITARIAN SPIRITUALITY. Washington, DC: Page Two, Inc., 2006 (\$12, info@WheeloftheYear.com).

Keep this handy for daily inspiration: from the full moon to Children's Day, from the date of Episcopal Bishop Barbara Harris' consecration (February 11, 1989) to the date the first woman was ordained in Reform Judaism (June 3, 1972). This calendar is packed with facts that make one grateful for the reminders.



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*"For every thing there is a season,
and a time for every matter
under heaven." (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*
May this season bring PEACE!

Holiday Greetings to You and Yours,
The WATER Staff