



water wheel

Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual • NEWSLETTER

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Creating Hope We Carry On By Mary E. Hunt

I never expected to see women and children tear-gassed at a U.S. border. I did not anticipate rising suicide rates and opioid overdoses related to despair in my own country. I could not have imagined a rerun of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas debacle in the persons of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh as the Supreme Court becomes increasingly conservative.

Who knew that deadly California wild fires would finally make climate change vivid for millions? Police brutality, driving while Black/Latinx, food scarcity on college campuses are all concepts I have had to learn in adulthood. I avoid referring to the sitting president and adding to the partisan divide.

It does not take a blue ribbon committee to conclude that times are tough for all but the wealthiest, whitest, most entitled. Where is the hope?

Many years ago, feminist songwriter Carolyn McDade captured the dynamic I need in her popular anthem "This Tough Spun Web." The whole song is lovely, powerful, inspiring. I find myself humming the chorus just to be able to watch the news and digest reports of increasingly toxic and incredible events: "This circle opening moves with deepened faith, our lives to birth a living dawn. As love renewed turns in our common way creating hope we carry on."

It is easy to sing, but hard to operationalize in a society where deeply divergent values hold sway. Efforts to cross the aisle, enter into dialogue with people with whom one disagrees, see the world from another perspective while suffering mounts often feel futile.

I saw hope in action at the 40th annual concert of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, DC, administrated by WATER colleague Judy Bond. Muslim,

Mormon, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Bahai community groups offered artistic expressions of faith in a large, welcoming synagogue. There is much to be said for a Democratic senator presenting a service award to a Republican counterpart (even if they are distant cousins in the Mormon line). Troubled times make such gestures powerful. Watching young Muslims, most in headscarves, sing "Stand By Me" was enough to make the hardest heart break open in hope. Mine did.

As if the world's woes were not enough, the Roman Catholic Church is imploding due to sex abuse crimes and cover-ups. For Catholics, it is a bad season as we watch the institution flame out in paroxysms of clericalism rooted in sexism, racism, and homohatred. Still, this human heart craves a reason to claim that love triumphs as Swedish theologian Krister Stendahl insisted in his comments on the writings of Paul.

A delegation of religious leaders led by a rabbi heads to the southern border. A phalanx of pastoral counselors always materializes after shootings like at the Tree of Life Synagogue. Catholic sisters and their friends made a bus tour ending in Mar-a-Lago to draw attention to the common good, the needs of the most needy. Food pantries parcel out sustenance. The question is whether any of it makes a difference. But doing nothing would be worse.

Again Carolyn McDade: "Hold true this tough spun web as hard times come and much be lost or taken away. We struggle not for things that best be gone, integrity rewebs our way."

People in my tough spun web register voters, drive immigrants to their appointments, serve meals to homeless people, lobby legislators, and vote. Pushing back against both structural and personal injustices may be the surest sign of hope, the best we can do for now. I hope it is enough to get through these hard times. ■

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WATER's Commitment for 35 Years and Moving Forward!

Our mission is to use feminist religious values to create social and religious change.

We affirm that all of WATER's efforts are focused on changing the cultural and intellectual assumptions that ground discrimination, exclusion, and destruction. We gather in service of a very different vision—inclusion, equality, and justice. All are welcome to participate in the steady sustaining of our vision in the many ways it unfolds around the world.

Thank You! Gracias! Merci! Asente! Danke! Arigato! Xie-Xie! Shukran! Toda!

As we reflect on 35 years of WATER, we are so grateful for YOU.

YOUR commitment to WATER's work inspires us and makes a difference for future generations.

YOUR generosity sustains WATER's communications, resources, programming, and networks for the WATER community and for the broader world of religious feminists and allies.

YOUR support helps to maintain strong voices working for good.

YOU ensure that WATER's much-needed work for social and religious justice will carry on to the next generations of feminists in religion.



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Who We Are

WATER is a global interreligious network, an educational and spiritual space, a center for dialogue on feminism, faith, and justice. We connect activists, religious leaders, students, scholars, and allies who are using feminist religious values to create social change. Founded in 1983 by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu, we have been empowering people to address structural violence for thirty-five years—making WATER one of the oldest feminist religious non-profit organizations in the world.

Join the WATER community as we work toward inclusive theologies and rituals, push for social change, and collaborate from inclusive perspectives. To learn more about what we do, visit us at www.waterwomensalliance.org.

Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu: Co-directors | Melissa Cedillo, Emily Neufeld: Staff Associates | Joe Scinto: Volunteer

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WATER Wishes You a Season of Celebration!

May the many lights of
Diwali, Hanukkah, Bodhi,
Winter Solstice, Christmas, Kwanza
illuminate a path toward justice,
a road to peace, and a people united in love.

Photo from WATERritual, Bringing the Light of Wisdom



Economics and Feminist Liberation Theology

By Mary E. Hunt

For the 22nd year in a row, the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network gathered at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado for its working session.

"Economics--Global and Local Intertwined: A Feminist Liberation Theology Priority" was this year's theme. Scholar/activists Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Church Divinity School of the Pacific offered challenging remarks to start discussion.

More than fifty participants from nine countries named their own economic priorities ranging from concerns about students' food scarcity and rising student debt, to questions about how neo-liberal capitalism shapes everything from the theological job market to privatization of formerly government-run agencies.

Susan laid out the parameters of global predatory capitalism: how the system can morph with the times to create the contradiction of "green billionaires." She advised critical attention to these matters and concluded that we in feminist studies in religion "don't quit" when it comes to working for change.

Cynthia underscored that global capitalism is a human invention that can be changed. She offered a "Feminist Liberation Ethical Framework for Building a New Economy" with emphasis on economics, ecology, and democracy. The stakes are high.

Participants discussed the California fires as an example of how differently people with resources and those without cope with disasters. They referred to people in the room who deal with student debt in a low-paying field. One person suggested the need to retire the notion of 'independence' entirely in favor of a more communal approach. Discussion continued the next day as FLTN once again partnered with the Women's Caucus that held a session with three papers on economics and a report on FLTN's meeting.

There was consensus that FLTN colleagues have a lot of resources to offer—including our circular power dynamics, our critical feminist analysis, the training of our peers to facilitate hard conversations in diverse communities. Our connections across continents are a resource as we chart a more just global economic future.

Next year's topic flowed quite naturally from this one. There is an urgency to look at climate change from feminist liberation theological perspectives. ■



L to r: Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary E. Hunt, and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite in conversation about economics at the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network in Denver, CO.

Women-Church Convergence to Catholic Hierarchy: "No More Abuse!"

Women-Church Convergence, of which WATER is a member, affirmed:

We, the undersigned members of Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of 28 feminist groups rooted in the Catholic tradition, say to the Catholic hierarchy and leadership throughout the world, "No More Abuse!"

...We are horrified and disgusted by the well-catalogued accounts of priest pedophilia, abuse of vulnerable adults, bishops forcing seminarians and other priests to engage in sex as a condition of employment, bishops covering up crimes, and the former nuncio's depiction of dueling factions among clerical higher-ups. We are shocked that bishops continued the abominable practice of moving priest perpetrators to different parishes and did not report the abuse as crimes to legal authorities.

...Enough is more than enough! Clerical privilege and episcopal rule by incompetent and sometimes criminal cardinals, bishops, and priests must end.

We begin by calling for these concrete next steps with many more to follow:

- We expect Catholics worldwide to engage in a massive theological and structural overhaul of the church beginning with competent committees of well-trained lay people to lead the Catholic communities in every diocese. Church leaders must be accountable to the people of God, as well as to appropriate civil authorities.

- We call on the Vatican to insure institutional transparency by calling every diocese to disclose on their websites and in their publications the names of priests and

employees with allegations against them, to lift the statutes of limitation on sexual abuse of minors, and to post the sexual abuse hotline number 877-995-5247.

- We demand that the Vatican remove all popes, cardinals, and bishops who reassigned sexually abusive priests from their leadership positions, and ensure that future bishops have never facilitated abuse. Recognizing that this means virtually all bishops, we repeat our call for meaningful leadership to be assumed by competent laity.

- We invite religious leaders from other faith traditions and secular professionals, especially counselors, social workers, ministers, rabbis, imams, and psychotherapists to step forward and help our communities support victims, report abuse, and speak out to church leaders. Catholic leaders have proved themselves incompetent to do this. We need help from outside of Catholic circles.

- We ask educators, parents, guardians, and parish leaders to offer age-appropriate education K-12 on the prevention of sexual violence.

- We urge the Catholic laity to develop a process of public reconciliation, based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, where victims and survivors of abuse can speak out to church leaders with the goal of moving forward together when perpetrators have admitted guilt and shown a disposition of restitution...

We pledge our energies and resources not to cleaning up a mess that is not of our making, but to living new, democratic egalitarian forms of church that are open to all. ■

WATER Program Highlights

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

WATERtalks

In October, **Teresia Mbari Hinga**, Professor at Santa Clara University, shared her book "African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters." She highlighted essays ranging from violence against women in the church to climate change.

In November, **Angela Yarber**, Executive Director of the Holy Women Icons Project, presented on "Holy Women Icons: Folk-Feminist Iconography and an Intersectionally Ecofeminist Philosophy of Creativity." Angela discussed how the Holy Women Icons non-profit organization combines creativity and justice work.

In December, **Alice Laffey**, Professor at College of the Holy Cross, is scheduled to discuss her recently published book "Wisdom Commentary: Ruth." She will focus on analogical imagination as essential for an appreciation of scripture.

WATERrituals

In the October ritual, *Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Breaking Silence*, **Diann L. Neu and the WATER staff** prayed for an end to domestic violence and committed to breaking silence about violence. Participants claimed their healing powers and through singing, empowered women to "rise up."

For the November ritual, *Thanksgiving: Gratitude for Women of Vision*, **Diann L. Neu and the WATER staff** gave thanks for women of vision – from goddesses to biblical women, notable women in recorded herstory, and women in our personal lives.

In the December ritual, *Bringing the Light of Wisdom*, **Diann L. Neu and the WATER staff** honored the many festivals of light. Our table was filled with candles and foods that represented Diwali, Hanukkah, Advent, Bodhi, Winter Solstice, and Kwanza.

WATERmeditations

In October, **Phoebe Knopf** shared one of her favorite poems, *V'ahavta ("and you shall love")* written by Aurora Levins Morales.

In November, right before the midterm elections, **Janet Bohren** reminded us of the importance of *Staying the Course* and standing together with hope.

In December, **Cheryl Nichols** will address *Who is my Neighbor?*

Women Crossing Worlds

From Mexico: Mari Carmen Servitje de Mariscal of Mexico City visited to discuss common themes in feminist studies in religion.

From Australia: Coralie Ling of Melbourne joined us at WATER for her annual Visiting Scholar week to catch up on the latest resources and her friends before the American Academy of Religion (AAR) meeting in Denver.

From Switzerland: Elisabeth Aeberli and Gabrielle Ferrazzini of Luzern joined us during their now annual U.S. visit including AAR, WATER, and this year the InterFaith Concert presented by the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington.

Feminist Liberation Theologian Network (FLTN)

In November, the FLTN gathered in Denver, CO. See report on page 2, "Economics and Feminist Liberation Theology."

WATERcounseling

Diann L. Neu does spiritual direction, psychotherapy, clergy supervision, and pastoral counseling at WATER for individuals, couples, and groups. Call 301.589.2509 to make an appointment.

Ritual: A New Year Blessing Cup

By Diann L. Neu

Fill your favorite cup with a drink you enjoy!

Centering

This is the season of endings and beginnings. Let the Spirit of Blessings surround me as I give thanks.

A Story of Three Cups

Once upon a time there were three cups. The first was empty, waiting, ready to receive whatever was poured into it. The second was filling with possibilities, pleasing the senses with anticipation. The third brimmed to overflowing, inviting the thirsty to receive its powers.

Look at Your Empty Cup

My cup, empty now, will soon be filled with drink. *Blessed are You, Divine Providence, for the potential you offer.*

Fill Your Cup with a Drink of Choice

In filling this cup I see the possibilities of the universe pouring forth through me. *Blessed are you, Source of Life, for filling my cup often.*

Hold Your Brimming Cup

This brimming cup is full of refreshment and renewal. *Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom, for your gifts of empowerment.*

Begin to Drink

With this *first sip*, I give thanks for liberating streams in my life. *(Pause)* With this *second sip*, I respect the diverse blessing cups given by and to others. *(Pause)* With this *third sip*, I offer the waters of life to a thirsty world. *(Pause)*

Reflection

Think of your cup of blessings for the New Year. Notice the beauty emanating from it – an empty space, a place for mystery, a possibility waiting to be filled, a hunger yearning to be satisfied, a brimming cup ready to share. What do I need in this cup? What do I accept from this cup? What will I give with this cup? *Take time now to meditate, write in a journal, converse, draw, dance, or do something else that gives you a pleasurable way to embody your own wisdom.*

Closing

This is the season of endings and beginnings. Let the Spirit of Blessings surround me as I give thanks.

Take Action for a Blessing

Fill the empty cup of another by calling, sending a card or an email, having a conversation, or reaching out just because.

© 2018 Diann Neu is Co-founder and Co-director of Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), dneu@hers.com.

