



water wheel

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

Volume 27 • Issue 1 • 2019

Left: Karis (2017 Summer Intern, front right) and Caitlin Slattery introduce baby Julian to WATER. **Top Center left:** Joe Scinto at his 86th birthday party with WATER! **Top center right:** Ashley Neufeld visits her twin sister Emily at WATER. **Right:** Charlotte Lim, 2018 Summer Intern from Singapore, shares her WATER experience. **Center (l to r):** Mennonite Volunteers Tiaro Paska Rivo, Emily Neufeld, Nate O'Leary, Laura Miller, Ellie Lapp, and Jamie Reich share a dinner with the WATER staff.

Internship with Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), USA

Passion applied at work

Charlotte Lim LiCi

I have been enthusiastic about studying the intersection of religion and feminism, but there were not many opportunities for me to critically engage with pertinent issues in these two very substantial fields. This internship was an eye-opening experience where I gained much academic knowledge through researching various subcategories of feminist theology and practical know-how such as collaborating with WATER's colleagues from other parts of the world.

You Can Make a Difference, Justice-seeking Friends!

In these difficult times, people depend on feminist religious hope and values to fuel the struggles for social and religious change.

You can provide life-giving support by partnering with us to sustain our vital spring programs. Here are just three!

Diann is preparing a book of 52 liturgies to be published.

WATER Staff will join the celebration of Ofelia Ortega's Doctorate in Matanzas, Cuba.

In June, three Summer Interns will join our team.

May we count on you to make a generous donation to WATER today? Let your spring be the best ever by giving a gift that brings joy, hope, and promise to generations.



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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 and religious change. Founded in 1983 by Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu, we have been empowering people to address structural violence for over thirty-five years—making WATER one of the oldest feminist religious non-profit organizations in the world.

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

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

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Spiritual Strength, Religious Renewal By Mary E. Hunt

Generations will recount the fiery destruction of Notre-Dame de Paris, the famous French cathedral, on April 15, 2019. Like the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, the catastrophic fall of the spire witnessed by thousands along the Seine River and tens of millions around the globe stopped the western world in its tracks. Closer to home, three Black churches were torched in Louisiana recently, in an alleged hate crime. Those buildings, too, hold the prayers and hearts of many.

The horror of what at this writing is considered a freak accident in Paris underscores a kind of collective, if inexplicable, reverence for sacred space. While the 850-year-old Gothic church belongs to France and not to the Roman Catholic Church, it is acclaimed, indeed beloved, for more than its architectural merit. Notre-Dame is a sanctuary, a place where beautiful rose windows and flying buttresses that were added to shore up the edifice say “holy” to many visitors. It is not accidental that the name and focus of the church is a female religious figure, Mary, whose many incarnations remind of the various ways the Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, and other religious models appear in history.

Looking at people's faces as the cathedral burned, and hearing countless stories of personal connections to this French treasure make clear that many people find spiritual strength in the collective energy that oozes from the portals. It is as if the prayers of one generation percolate and permeate, creating what developmental biology calls morphogenic fields. Whatever it is that attracts 13 million visitors a year, Notre-Dame has it, just like the southern rural churches now charred.

Historians point out that the site of the cathedral had long been a place sacred to many communities. Whether god or goddess worshippers, Christians and others who like the extraordinary organ music have flocked to this place for nearly a millennium. The building's history, and its especially rocky time during the French Revolution, gave way to its eventual return to Catholic ownership. Joan of Arc was beatified there in April 1909, lending even more luster to the space.

The church was contested, indeed coveted, not so much for its denominational significance as for its representation of all things French. Notre-Dame's central, iconic status speaks to continuity and at least the illusion of stability in a rapidly changing world. Painted, photographed, remembered billions of times over, the sanctuary on the Seine lives despite this round

of destruction, and it will surely rise again. So, too, the Black churches must be given resources to thrive again.

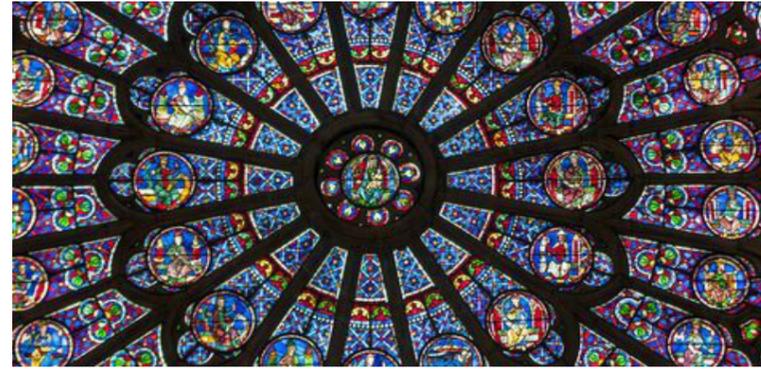
The human yearning for such touchstones, something tangible in the midst of turbulent times in the world order, seems to explain the raw emotion many of us felt as we watched the fire destroy the wooden roof made from trees that were planted a thousand years ago. The yearning is not so much for permanence as for connection. That is what religions (*L. religere*) do; they tie and bind.

Religious practices change and the names of religious groups come and go. But the many iterations that make up the complicated history of Notre-Dame are a case study in religious renewal. They are layers upon layers of human suffering and hope. The stones that protected some of the building's treasures, and the fire fighters who risked their lives to extract other objects form one bulwark against cultural extinction. That spirit is strong.

Good luck arguing that religion is a thing of the past. Tell that to the people who in the first twenty-four hours after the fire pledged hundreds of millions of Euros to rebuild Notre-Dame. Tell that to generations of black church parishioners. Most people are not motivated by any of the relatively small religious differences over which wars are fought and lands destroyed. Rather, they put their treasure where their hearts are: in the big religious idea that all of creation is connected, ongoing, and sacred.

Welcome to the 21st century, Notre-Dame. May you and your sister sanctuaries live forever. ■

Mary E. Hunt is Co-founder and Co-director of Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), mhunt@hers.com



Notre-Dame's three iconic rose windows made it through the fire intact. The roses crown the north, west, and south sides of the cathedral. They are one of the church's most recognizable images.

Women-Church Moving Forward

The Women-Church Convergence held its annual meeting at Pendle Hill Quaker Center, April 5-7, 2019, in Pennsylvania. SEPAWOC, the local Women's Ordination Conference chapter, organized a panel of four women who addressed the compelling topic, "How equality can flourish in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-generational church: What does this church look like physically, spiritually, doctrinally?" No magic answers emerged, but welcome wisdom was shed on the question.

Mariam I. Williams, a writer and dancer; Marian Ronan, a professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary and member of the Grail; Kathleen Grimes who teaches theological ethics at Villanova University; and Sonja Spoo, formerly of Catholics for Choice and now directing media campaigns for UltraViolet brought to bear their various and overlapping perspectives.

They suggested that the future will include resources from many faith traditions. Contemporary sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and its cover-up by other clergy needs to be understood along with growing environmental destruction and gaping economic differences. Anti-racism work is vital to any new forms of church. One way to bring all of this about is through prudent use of technology. ■

WATER is a founding member of the Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of 26 autonomous Catholic-rooted groups working to build just social and ecclesial structures with shared power for everyone, especially women and those whom church and society marginalize.



Front l to r: Mary E. Hunt of WATER, Carolyn Kellogg of A Critical Mass, Mary Grace Crowley-Koch of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Margaret Cooper of SEPAWOC, Mary Donnelly of Women of Dignity. **Back l to r:** Ruth Steinert-Foote of Greater Cincinnati Women-Church, Marianne Duddy-Burke of DignityUSA, Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe of Catholics for Choice at the Women-Church gathering in Philadelphia.



l to r: "Catholics for Human Rights: Challenging the Holy See" panel during the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women: Amanda Ussak of Catholics for Choice; Kate McElwee of Women's Ordination Conference; Carmen Arriaga, translator; Sara Oviedo formerly of the Committee of the Rights of the Child of the UN; Mary E. Hunt of WATER; Virginia Saldanha of the Indian Women Theologians Forum; Barbara Dorris of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests; Carla Rivera of Grupo Parlamentario Interamericano sobre Población y Desarrollo-GPI; and Mary Anne Case of University of Chicago Law School.

Arrivaderchi Roma!

Catholics for Human Rights, an ad hoc coalition committed to modifying the Holy See's presence at the United Nations, sponsored two lively sessions in New York City on March 14, 2019 as part of many meetings held around the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) deliberations. WATER co-director Mary E. Hunt joined colleagues from India, Ecuador, Panama, and the U.S. who laid out reason to relieve the Roman Catholic Church of Permanent Observer status and invite it to become, like many other religious organizations, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) registered at the UN.

The Vatican's theo-political sleight of hand that resulted in its current status as a non-voting but participating 'country' at the UN is now under study. "Catholic" is not a nationality, and rumors that the Vatican might field an Olympic team point out the absurdity. Moreover, the Vatican's frequent collusion with conservative

states such as Saudi Arabia to prevent consensus on issues related to women and gender make the Holy See especially unwelcome at CSW. Its failure to fulfill its reporting obligation, especially on treaties dealing with children, make the Holy See's claims to statehood seem increasingly dubious and dangerous.

No one is under the illusion that the Vatican will go quietly. But as sexual abuse survivors point out, because the Church protects some priest perpetrators under the guise of diplomatic immunity, it is high time to revisit this situation. Stay tuned for more action as member states begin to consider the however awkward option of showing unwelcome guests the door. ■

Read Mary E. Hunt's "The Vatican's Graceful Exit from the United Nations Starts at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)" at waterwomensalliance.org under "In the News."

Congratulations to Womanist Theologians

Thirty years ago, womanist scholars including Dr. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Dr. Cheryl Sanders, Dr. Delores Carpenter, and Dr. Delores Williams gathered at Howard University Divinity School in Washington, DC, to help lay the groundwork for womanist theology.

This season, thirty years later, they (missing only Delores Williams who faces health challenges) and with Dr. Renita Weems and others shared their wisdom with scores of colleagues in the academy and in ministry at a conference entitled "Continuing the Womanist Tapestry."

They celebrated their achievements, assessed their impact, and sketched future directions of womanist studies in religion with special attention to the work of women ministers.

WATER wishes womanist colleagues many more generations of productive, world-shaping work.

2019 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 January, **Nancy Wilson**, retired Moderator of the Metropolitan Community Churches, shared her book *I Love to Tell the Story*. She discussed her experiences of pastoring on the margins as an open lesbian at the intersection of many communities and issues.

In February, **Patricia Beattie Jung** presented an overview of her book *Sex on Earth as It Is in Heaven*. In a lively discussion, Patricia reconstructed a theological foundation for the claim that there will be sex in heaven and what that might look like.

In March, **Gay L. Byron** focused her presentation on her work *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, co-edited with Vanessa Lovelace. She highlighted essays within the book which covered topics ranging from gender and sexuality to biblical children and childhood.

WATERrituals

In the January ritual, *A Cup of Blessings for the New Year*, **Diann L. Neu, Emily Neufeld, and the WATER community** celebrated the season of endings and beginnings. Together the group contemplated what each of their respective cups were brimming with, and how to share their own refreshment and renewal.

For the February ritual, *Feminist Wisdom for Peace and Healing*, **Diann, Emily, and the WATER community** gathered to retell stories of women's wisdom that have been represented in many mythologies through serpent imagery.

In the March ritual, *Celebrate National Women's History Month*, **Diann, Emily, and the WATER community** honored and thanked women locally, nationally, and internationally for sharing their unique gifts with the world.

WATERmeditations

In January, **Virginia Day** led a reflection titled *Epiphany*, sharing the poem "Watching the Ancestral Prayers of Venerable Others" by Pattiann Rogers.

In February, **Cynthia Tootle** led the circle focusing on Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom.

In March, **Mary E. Hunt** shared the poem "Prayer" by Mary Oliver as a stepping stone to communal reflection and as an act of gratitude for Mary Oliver's life.

WATERcounseling

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

In the News

"Rome Has Spoken and Rome Is Finished: The Vatican's Sexual Abuse Summit 'Failed Miserably'" in *Religion Dispatches* by **Mary E. Hunt**, February 27, 2019.

"As UN Considers Status of Women, It's Time for the Vatican to Take Its Rightful Place" in *Religion Dispatches* by **Mary E. Hunt**, March 13, 2019.

Ritual: Listen to Cries for Justice

By Diann L. Neu

People, Earth, animals, plants, water, air, fire, the universe - all are crying for justice.

Invocation of the Spirits

Light a candle. O Wisdom of the South, you who are Fire, warm our hurting spirits and open us to stand with all who are crying. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Sound chimes. O Wisdom of the East, you who are Air, empower us with your rising sun to breathe in and out again. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Put compost into a pot. O Wisdom of the North, you who are Earth, strengthen us to move beyond what is cold and harsh in life. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Pour water into a bowl. O Wisdom of the West, you who are Water, refresh us with waterfalls to heal the hurts. Be with us as we listen to the cries and act for justice.

Lamentations for Justice

Question: Mother, why are you weeping?

Lament 1: I am an immigrant mother threatened with deportation and losing my children.

Response: Mother, we see your tears and stand with you.

Question: Brother, why are you weeping?

Lament 2: I am a survivor of clergy sexual abuse.

Response: Brother, we see your tears and stand with you.

Question: Sister, why are you weeping?

Lament 3: My child died in the war.

Response: Sister, we see your tears and stand with you.

Continue with the Question, Lament, and Response format.

Lament 4: My friend is experiencing homelessness.

Lament 5: I am living with cancer.

Lament 6: My sister is a survivor of human trafficking.

Lament 7: My friend is a survivor of domestic violence.

Blessing with Water

All who cry, come to the water. Get your hands wet, and bless yourself, especially your eyes, with this Source of Life.

Sending Forth

May we listen and take action when we notice injustice.

May all who are hurting be healed. Amen. Let It Be So.

Take Action

~ Comfort someone who is weeping by calling them, sending them a card, or taking them out for tea.

~ Call your Congressperson and tell them to support a particular justice issue.

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

