Coping with World Turmoil
By Mary E. Hunt

Every generation tends to think that its situation is graver or more challenging than any time before. The global political turmoil at this writing—US foreign policy in shambles, Brexit in question, Turkey and Syria on the edge, Russia dominating the scene, China at odds with Hong Kong, ecological destruction already too far advanced to save vast swaths of the planet—rivals any I have experienced.

Outcomes are jiffy at best. Living in the Washington, DC area makes much of this local news. Many people, even those quite remote from the most acute scenes, are visibly upset with good reason. I ponder what it means to be involved in feminist theology, ethics, and ritual at such a time as this, and how we at WATER might be most useful. Several strategies occur that might be helpful as others think through their responsibilities and possibilities as well.

A traditional role of religions has been to function as community gathering places, both literal and figurative. WATER is that place for many people. Being nonhierarchical and inclusive and including many spiritual but not religious folks, we have discovered that both an open door and an open phone are crucial for the in-gathering of those who want to share uncertainties, gather data, and make well-informed decisions in hard times. They want to pray and meditate too, so we offer those as regular options. I urge other groups to do the same. There is no substitute for real time contact, even by phone, Zoom, or Skype to bear diverse opinions and share hopes.

Another effective strategy is to engage in the critical study that hones analytic skills. Doing so in multi-national settings is the gold standard. It is no wonder that the topic for WATER’s 23rd Feminist Theology, Ethics, and Ritual Network meeting is climate change. It is no coincidence that our speakers are from Brasil and Australia, two places deeply affected by the current crises.

A third way that works is to take angst seriously and turn it into action. There is monumental uncertainty, especially for those who experience food scarcity, water shortages, power outages, and the like. At the same time, some others watch their retirement accounts grow exponentially and their children’s salaries exceed theirs as the gap grows between elites and the rest. Feminist approaches to socializing resources, for example, giving and receiving that would transform the world that Genevieve Vaughan refers to as a “the gift economy,” bear careful consideration. We encourage such sharing, pushing ourselves beyond our giving comfort zones to bring about real change.

Finally, since so many roots in injustice can be traced to a judging God, a Ruler King, lordship and dominance, we encourage a wholesale overhaul of religious images and symbols. Resistance to that work is the measure of its necessity. Imagine if common language about the divine were gender inclusive, better, not anthropomorphic at all. Consider what a creation story that puts plants and animals on the same plane as people would do for ecology. Think about ways to teach children that diversity and difference, not sameness and dominance are to be celebrated.

The turmoil will not end soon. WATER and friends will cope, and in so doing participate in its transformation.

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A WATER WELCOME TO TECHIKA RHODES

We are delighted that Wesley Theological Seminary second-year Master of Divinity student Techika Rhodes will do her Practice in Ministry and Mission (field education) at WATER for 2019-2020. She is a graduate of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock with a Sociology major. In addition to her studies, Techika, a Missionary Baptist/Pentecostal member, is also a musician who sings and plays the trombone, so we look forward to her hand in WATER rituals.

Techika aspires to start her own non-profit organization. Learning the nuts and bolts at WATER, combined with a deep commitment to social justice make her a welcome colleague. The Rev. Clarafrancie D. Cromer, a Wesley graduate who also did her PMM at WATER, is her Clergy Partner.
Reflections from WATER 2019 Interns

From Emily Neufeld, Mennonite Voluntary Service:

In my year at WATER, I learned the power of hospitality, resilience, and community. Hospitality emerged from the hours spent in conversation (with a cup of tea in hand) hosting prominent feminist scholars, question askers, and change makers. Resilience was obvious in the way we kept hope and action at the forefront of the day-to-day work at WATER in a time of political corruption. Most importantly, community grew from the investment Mary and Diann continually made in my life, friendships formed with summer interns (Claire, Kali, Kennedy), and support that continues from countless women who are all part of this powerful Alliance.

From Kali Huyin Lo Ng, Beloit College:

I came into WATER as a Religious Studies and Creative Writing major from Beloit College. I had spent my education so far studying religion in a classroom (without any feminist input in the curriculum), and I wanted hands-on experience applying myself in a functioning nonprofit that worked in an area I cared about.

As it turned out, I had an amazing experience at WATER. It completely changed the way I think about my work in the future, and the community of feminist leaders and scholars around me. From day one, Mary, Diann, and Emily welcomed me with genuine warmth and immediately familiarized me with what was happening in the community, also encouraging me to contribute to conversations and creative projects.

I made work I was proud of, such as book reviews, teleconference notes, and even a research essay. I saw how collaboration improves a community, and how community improves what you accomplish. Interacting at the WATER office and meeting so many incredible women reminded me that religious studies and social justice work are absolutely essential parts of my life and others’. I know that WATER and what I’ve learned from my summer at the office will continue to influence my work.

From Kennedy Thedford, Agnes Scott College:

I am a Junior at Agnes Scott College, studying Religion & Social Justice and Spanish. At Agnes we aim toward social justice, but since we are a small college we do not have the resources to focus on minority views and Spanish. At Agnes I find myself constantly engaged in conversations and studies about the religious experiences and traditions of different people, ways they are teaching religious ideas, and relationships between religions. I learned from WATER that religion is not just studying and prayer, but also action.

Fall WATER Program Highlights

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

WATERtalks
In July, Annamari Sanders, BHM, shared However Long the Night: Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis. She told the story of what was learned by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious during a six-year crisis (2009-2015) when the Vatican’s Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith suddenly and very publicly confronted the organization with forceful questions and negative assumptions.

In July, Dolly Pomerleau presented A Discussion on the Quixote Center and the Continuing Journey of Activist Work. Dolly, a seasoned activist, is the co-founder with Bill Callahan of Quixote Center, a gathering of people who work and pray with laughter and who reach for the stars that seem too distant to be touched, or too dim to be worth the effort.

In September, Marianne Duddly-Burke focused her conversation on DignityUSA: Passion, Persistence, Prophetic Witness. Celebrating 50 Years and Inspired for What’s Ahead. She laid out the many challenges DignityUSA and groups like it face as LGBTQA+ people deal with the current backlash and the lack of rights in many countries.

WATER Rituals
In July, Diann L. Neu and the WATER staff invited us to Hand in Hand: Imagine. We blessed our hands and gave thanks for the many ways our hands reach out and connect to beloved family, friends, and colleagues around the world where they live.

In September, Diann L. Neu and the WATER staff gathered us to celebrate LIL Peacemakers for International Day of Peace. In the midst of a troubled world, we asked: “What kind of peacemakers do we need to raise up?” And throughout our celebration, we joined in a “growing” ritual, then gave thanks for their witness, and challenged each other to continue to act for peace.

WATER Meditations
In July, Janet Bohren encouraged us to reflect on Trees. Summer’s Greatest Wonder. She told the story of the life of sycamore tree that she planted in her yard years ago. Then she invited us to think about trees that have been meaningful in our lives. She asked us: Why do we plant trees in memory of people?

In September, Mary E. Hunt invited us to listen to A Song Flung Up to Heaven by Maya Angelou to begin our new meditation season at WATER. Mary, like Maya, focused on the hope necessary for survival and flourishing.

WATER Counseling
Diann L. Neu does spiritual direction, psychotherapy, clergy supervision, and pastoral counseling at WATER for individuals, couples, and groups. Call 303-859-2509 to make an appointment.

In the News


Butterflies for Immigrant Children in Detention Centers

In addition to lobbying and providing material needs for immigrants, WATER invites you, your group, your friends to make butterflies and give them to people in your area to bring about greater awareness, prayer, and advocacy for immigrant children. This call came from the SWMC Peace and Justice Club and the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN.

When two young girls, Kaia Martin and Lily Ellis in California realized that as of December 2018, 15,000 migrant children had been placed in US detention centers, they decided to make 15,000 butterflies to raise awareness of the inhumane treatment of each of these children. Why butterflies? Because they also migrate.

You can make 4-inch butterflies out of recycled paper, old magazines, and scraps of paper. We invite you to make some way you like with whatever you have at hand and distribute them to people in your area. Google how to make paper butterflies: https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-Butterfly

Fall WATER Program Highlights

Harvest invites gratitude. Gratitude to you for working hard to increase justice. Gratitude to you for giving back to your communities. Gratitude to you for harvesting resilience in these dangerous and distressing historical times. Resilience is life force we recommend to recover quickly from difficulties. How is this happening in the current political conflict?

Reading from Polingaysi Qoyawaya Mary E. Hunt: on Capital Hill at Catholic Day of Action to oppose the wall. No Turning Back: A Hopi Indian Woman’s Struggle to Live in Two Worlds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964)

“I grind with gratitude for the richness of our harvest, not with cross feelings of working too hard. As I kneel at my grinding stone, I bow my head in prayer. Thanking the great forces for provision, I have received much. I am willing to give much in return, for as I have taught you, there must always be a giving back for what one receives.”

Reflection | Discussion
Let us reflect on what we have heard and think about the ways in which we harvest resilience. As we share, let’s name a practice which produces resilience within ourselves and one that strengthens us to work for justice.

Blessing Apples and Cider
Let us savor our goodness and fortify ourselves to resist injustice in these troubled times.

Hold the apple: Blessed are you, Holy One of the Harvest, for giving us this apple. As we eat it, may we taste the sweetness of community and be grateful for all of the ways we cultivate resilience.

Hold the cider: Blessed are you, Holy One of the Harvest, for giving us this cider. As we drink this cup, may we enjoy the warmth, spice, and sweetness required to put our gratitude and resilience into action.

Sending Forth
Let us go forth in peace with every breath of gratitude, every thought that harvests resilience, every word filled with grace and compassion, and every work channeled in love for justice. With the help of Divine Wisdom, let this be our life today and forever. Amen. Blessed be: May it be so.

Take Action
- Take a walk outside and enjoy the beauty of the Earth.
- Think about ways to be a part of future elections to assure that justice-seeking candidates are chosen.

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