

A Word of Hope and Help from WATER at This Liminal Time in Our Fragile World’s History

We greet you with an elbow bump and a smile. Please take special care during these troubled times. This is like a Jubilee time, a holy interval, when the land lies fallow, debts are forgiven, rest and renewal fuel the next stage of human history.

After the world takes a pause and those who are ill from the coronavirus are cared for, our focus is on the horizon, the time when the global pandemic is contained. Our spiritual traditions, leavened by women’s ancient unto contemporary wisdom, allow us a few certainties:

- 1. The needs of those who are most at risk—the poor, the sick, the elderly, those who are alone—are of priority concern.
- 2. The basic human rights to medical care, food, work, and the like need to be enshrined, not given provisionally at times of crisis, but woven into the fabric of a good society.
- 3. Kindness and care for immigrants and orphans, struggling students and frail elderly are hallmarks of the society we want post-pandemic, not just during its height.
- 4. The vast wealth—both economic and environmental—of our globe needs to be shared, socialized, to ensure that all have access to long and healthy lives.

These are part of WATER’s vision for our collective future. When the museums and schools reopen, when everyone has health care, sick leave, and childcare all the time not just in a pandemic, it will be a new day. We will be a step closer to our goal of justice and mutuality. We commit to work to make this vision reality. We struggle to make something substantive emerge from this global emergency. Please let us know how we can be helpful to you and your communities in these challenging times.



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“Something About the Women...”

By Mary E. Hunt

In the YMCA where I swim, three lovely posters celebrating American history are on display. One lifts up African-Americans, one celebrates LGBTIQ people, and one celebrated women. Every time I walked by them, I am reminded of how these groups struggle to survive and thrive in what has long been a culture hostile to them.

One day, I noticed that the poster featuring women had been defaced with a ballpoint pen. Hillary Clinton’s face had been violently etched with unspeakable markings. I reported this to the Y leadership. I was assured it would be taken down and replaced. Fortunately, it was. A week later, I had to make the same report as the replacement poster had been defaced as well. Once more, I reported to the authorities, and it was taken down.

This time, it was replaced by a cheery poster featuring several children. Women disappeared.

I could have tried again, but I decided to spend my time otherwise, knowing I could get into an endless repetition of the same dynamic. This is a ‘sign of the times’ and a metaphor for contemporary women’s experiences.

The UN Development Programme’s 2020 bleak but realistic report, “Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities,” http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hd_perspectives_gsn.pdf, indicates that “Gender disparities are a persistent form of inequality in every country... The Human Development Report’s Gender Inequality Index—a measure of women’s empowerment in health, education and economic status—shows that overall progress in gender inequality has been slowing in recent years.” The report documents that even in countries where women are better educated than men, “they still receive on average 39 percent less income than men—despite devoting more time to work.” Glaringly, religion is left out of the investigation of causes and possible cures for this “inequality plateau.”

All the while, colleagues in religion have been working harder than ever to demonstrate the intricate and intimate links among religion, gender, and culture. We know that language and imagery about the divine, the persistence of male leadership, and the stories and hymns that glorify male saviors are a deeply rooted cause, a sometimes deeply unconscious reason why people cannot imagine and value empowered women. “If you can’t see it you can’t be it” as the adage goes. Just ask Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, or Amy Klobuchar this season.

Meanwhile, femicides continue in Mexico; immigrant women who clean airplanes, and maids on cruise ships during a global health emergency are the forgotten, expendable lives. They and their siblings (beyond the binary) pay the top price for researchers’ and strategists’ failure to look at religion, an obvious factor among many in the equations of injustice.

WATER’s work reveals that people are carefully taught from our earliest religious education in many faith traditions to discriminate against those who do not “bear a natural resemblance” to the Divine in whose image we are said to be created. The results are deadly.

Music provides consolation and motivation in tough times. These days I find myself humming a Holy Near classic, “Something about the women.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSPvJ9lvpas>

Yes, there is something about the women that both grieves and catalyzes me. Start at the beginning, with faiths and religious practices, theologies and worship, where basic ideologies come from. Fix those. The rest may follow more quickly and inclusively than we dare imagine. ■

© 2020 Mary E. Hunt is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), mhunt@hers.com

Come Intern at WATER!

Are you or someone you know interested in learning about feminist theology, ethics, and ritual and the ins and outs of a feminist nonprofit? We welcome you to the table—WATER is now accepting internship applications.

Apply by April 15th, 2020 for a summer internship which typically begins in May and finishes at the end of July. Applications also being accepted for fall (September 2020), Spring (January 2021), and full year interns. WATER intern applications can be found on the WATER website. Contact the office with other questions at (301) 589-2509 or send an email to waterstaff@hers.com.

We hope that you or a young feminist you know is interested in working with us at WATER! We welcome YOU!



From l to r: Diann L. Neu, WATER Interns Kali Lo-Ng, Emily Neufeld, and Kennedy Thedford with Mary E. Hunt at a rally on Capitol Hill to end childhood detention.



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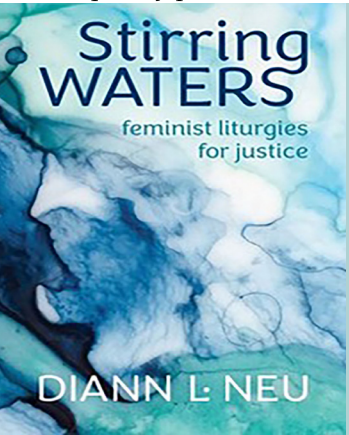
Who We Are

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 | Techika Rhodes, Laura Carr-Pries: Interns | Hannah Dorfman, Emily Neufeld: Staff | Joe Scinto: Volunteer

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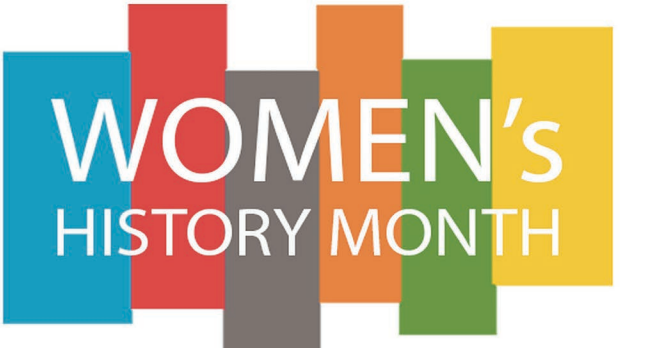
Order Today! Stirring WATERS: Feminist Liturgies for Justice by Diann L. Neu

Fifty-two beautiful WATER liturgies, ready-made to help your community celebrate powerful women of faith, develop a richer and deeper spirituality, and take real action for justice.

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.

Please send ____ copies of Stirring WATERS, \$39.95 each.

☐ Order online www.waterwomensalliance.org/shop/stirring-waters/
☐ My check is enclosed. ☐ Please bill me later.
Send Name | Phone, Email | Address, City, State, Zip to WATER



READ!

"A Game Changer for Gender Inequality," new report from the UN Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/GSNI>

"Despite decades of progress closing the equality gap between men and women, close to **90 percent of men and women hold some sort of bias against women**, providing new clues to the invisible barriers women face in achieving equality."

"Despite remarkable progress in some areas, no country in the world—rich or poor—has achieved gender equality."

"All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, in education, at home and in the labor market—with negative repercussions for their freedoms."

WEEP!

and mourn the tragic waste of women's potential and talents.

ACT!

with WATER and sister groups every day to change this disgraceful situation.

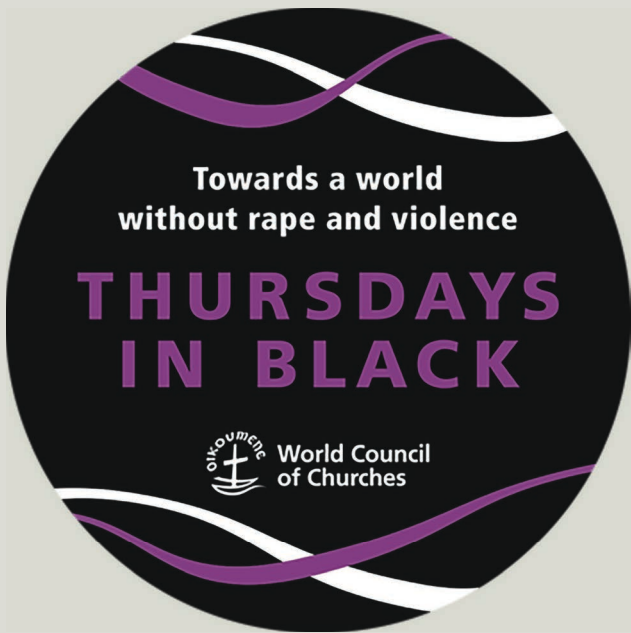
"The eyes of all future generations are upon you..."
- Greta Thunberg, teen Swedish climate activist

Join the Thursdays in Black Campaign:
Resistance and Resilience: Towards a world without rape and violence

In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence is frequently hidden, and victims are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence.

We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets – in all places in our societies.

The campaign is simple but profound. **Wear black on Thursdays.** Wear a pin to declare you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. Encourage others to join you. Often black has been used with negative racial connotations. In this campaign Black is used as a color of resistance and resilience.



Spring WATER Program Highlights

By Laura Carr-Pries

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, **Gale Yee** provided an impressive overview of feminist and intersectional biblical interpretation in presenting *The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives*. This discussion provided rich insights into how biblical scholarship can be a part of activism and dismantling oppression.

In February, **Kathryn Lofton** presented her book *Consuming Religion*, inviting discussion on the relationship between religion and consumer culture. The essays in this book invite people to consider how corporations and their created communities motivate people towards a common goal.

In March, we celebrated the release of **Diann Neu's** new book, *Stirring WATERS: Feminist Liturgies for Justice*, and explored the feminist liturgies in this book that celebrate the lives and experiences of women from various cultures and backgrounds. Diann provided insight on how to develop a feminist liturgy, and how these liturgies move us towards acting for justice.

WATERrituals

In January, **Diann Neu and Techika Rhodes** invited us to *Step into the Pool with Sojourner Truth*. We challenged one another to respond to Sojourner's invitation to step into the pool while the waters are stirring as we begin a new decade.

In February, **Diann Neu and WATER Staff** called us to *Witness Womanist Wisdom during Black History Month*. We gathered to be inspired by the voices, words, and music of womanists who resist all forms of social oppression.

In March, **Diann Neu, Techika Rhodes, and Laura Carr-Pries** led us in remembering and celebrating the life and legacy of Harriet Tubman. We considered the ways that Harriet, underground railroad conductor, abolitionist, and women's rights activist, inspires and motivates us to pursue justice today.

WATERmeditations

In January, **Virginia Day** guided us in a reflection on our hopes for the New Year by sharing *The Land of Beginning Again* by Louisa Fletcher.

In February, **Mary E. Hunt** shared Maya Angelou's powerful poem, "*Continue*," as a source of inspiration and an antidote to feelings of defeat and despair.

In March, **Laura Carr-Pries** invited us to ask: what makes a place a home? She guided us using the children's book *a house that once was* by Julie Fogliano.

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

"Rich portrait of a social change agent in biography of Grail leader Anne Hope" by **Mary E. Hunt** in the National Catholic Reporter. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/rich-portrait-social-change-agent-biography-grail-leader-anne-hunt>

Earth Day Ritual

By Diann L. Neu

Earth Day, April 22, invites us to reflect on how Earth takes care of us, and it challenges us to take better care of Earth. It provides a unique opportunity to support environmental protection and climate justice. We ignore this at our collective peril. (Gather herbs to plant.)

Call to Gather

Though we find ourselves in the midst of turmoil with coronavirus, climate change, immigrant protection, and U.S. elections, let us not forget to open our eyes to the promise of spring (or fall for those in the Southern Hemisphere), and to recommit ourselves and our justice movements to care for all of creation.

Litany: Holy Is Your Creation

Climate change is real, and scientists have shown that humans are causing it.

Response: Holy is your Creation.
We can make a difference and slow climate change down.

Response: We are the stewards of your Creation.
Half of the world's forests no longer exist.

R: Holy is your Creation.
We can use cloth instead of paper products.

R: We are the stewards...
In the past forty years, humans have directly or indirectly killed half of all existing wildlife. R: Holy...

We can visit a national or state park to remember the holiness of the natural and wild world. R: We are the stewards...

Sea levels are rising, and by 2100 the White House could have an ocean view. R: Holy...

We can choose public transportation and reduce our carbon footprint. R: We are the stewards...

We can reduce and reuse before recycling. R: Holy...

We can eat less or no meat. Rainforests are being replaced with farms largely used to feed livestock. That same food could feed people instead. R: We are the stewards...

Climate change is real, and scientists have shown that humans are causing it. We also have the power to slow it down.

R: Holy is your Creation; we will be the stewards.

Reflection | Sharing

Plant an herb, share your reflections on what Earth means to you, and how you will nurture it.

Take Action for Earth

Let us put our prayers into action.
. Reduce waste by choosing reusable options whenever possible. Follow the phrase "Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, and Recycle."

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From l to r: Techika and Laura at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, learning about the richness and diversity of the African American experience, what it means to their lives, and how it helped shape this nation.

Welcome Laura Carr-Pries!

By Techika Rhodes

WATER welcomes Laura Carr-Pries of the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program to WATER. Laura, who comes from Canada, is a delightful addition to our staff. She comes with an excellent set of skills, just what we need to develop social media and insightful writing. Laura recently led a *WATERmeditation* based on a children's book, a unique way into contemplative practice.

When Laura finishes her year of voluntary service, she plans to go on to further studies in peacebuilding and theology. Some of her favorite hobbies are cooking and cycling. We hope she is finding Washington, DC a fascinating city.

As a Wesley Theological Seminary intern, I am delighted to have a colleague join me in the work of feminist social justice at WATER. It is great to work with Laura. Together we will welcome summer interns who will also bring new skills and insights to our efforts.