

Reflection from a Wesley Theological Seminary Intern

By Techika Rhodes

I have served as a WATER staff associate for the last year through Wesley Theological Seminary’s Practice of Ministry and Mission program. It has been both a transformative and enlightening process. There have been many important lessons that I have learned along the way and for that I am grateful.

For many years I have desired to learn about the ins and outs of nonprofit work and WATER served as the perfect fit because they uphold integrity in the work of feminist social justice. I have desired to serve outside of a church context. I would like to open either my own nonprofit organization or a women’s center so women can be empowered and rejuvenated. Through the help of WATER, my sense of community and church has been broadened, and I now feel better prepared to provide liturgies outside of a traditional church context. Through collaborative processes of planning monthly rituals, I have been more emboldened to make use of my musical gifts.

By reaching out to faithful donors, I was able to utilize my gifts of hospitality which will help me in the work of the ministry. My greatest learning curve was learning how to use a Mac computer, as I have often used other brands. I learned how to order and process books from various publishing companies that become part of our Carol Murdock Scinto Library.

Through Wesley’s Practice of Ministry and Mission program we were invited to have monthly theological reflections. I was privileged to be mentored by Dr. Diann L. Neu and the Rev. Clarafrancie Cromer. They have both assisted and challenged me to expand my horizons. They have introduced me to womanist theology, and I am still learning more about this subject. Much to my surprise, I have learned more about my culture as an African American woman.

I have had the privilege to both work beside and travel with my colleague Laura Carr-Pries to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Laura and I went with Cheryl Nichols, long-time WATER colleague, to the Harriet Tubman Museum and historic sites in Cambridge, MD as inspiration for the Harriet Tubman ritual we planned for Women’s History Month. Overall, my time at WATER has been very life giving as I have served with the WATER staff, and the many great women who are a part of the Alliance.



Reflection from a Mennonite Voluntary Service Intern

By Laura Carr-Pries

I came to WATER in January 2020 through the Mennonite Voluntary Service program. As we transitioned to working from home in March, I spent more of my time working remotely than in person. I am very grateful for the time that I spent in the office working

alongside Diann, Mary, Techika, and Joe. These strong relationships at WATER, formed over cups of tea, allowed me to continue feeling connected to my colleagues when we began working remotely. My time at WATER has given me many gifts that I will carry forward.

In planning WATERrituals alongside Diann and Techika, I was struck by the creative and imaginative spirit that emerges in working together across denominational lines and seeking to build upon our unique traditions. This experience in feminist liturgy and ritual planning has expanded my understandings and ideas of how communities can gather together in prayer to be sustained while acting for justice.

One of the unique pieces of working at a feminist non-profit is the collaborative spirit of WATER that is woven through all the work. I appreciated and learned so much by being part of a team that sought to share knowledge and expertise, and to create together. I loved the process of reading and reviewing books in feminist theology and then coming together as a team to craft these reviews.

As WATER has transitioned to Zoom, I valued meeting with individuals in the Alliance to navigate this technology together. I have deeply appreciated the help that was given to me and discovering ways that we could connect.

Throughout the sobering realities of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests, conversations during WATER programs and the people who I have met have filled me with hope. I am very grateful for the opportunities that I have had to reflect, to ask questions, and listen to scholars, activists, and mentors. The commitment of those in WATER to pursuing justice has inspired me to take continued action for change.

I am incredibly grateful for the time I spent at WATER, and the ways that I am sure I will keep learning from and connecting with those I have met here. And, thank you to Mary and Diann for your leadership, your mentorship and commitment to making WATER a place that nurtures learning.



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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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Living Sorrow and Hope

By Mary E. Hunt

At a recent WATER Meditation, Cynthia Tootle, Associate Minister of the Takoma Metaphysical Chapel, introduced the Zoom group to Thubten Chodron’s “Sorrow and Hope: A Prayer to Kwan Yin.” The prayer captures the current mood, now nearly six months into the Covid-19 pandemic, deep into a national and worldwide reset on race and ethnicity, and on the cusp of a worldwide economic crisis that will reshape the world power equation.

It is a harrowing time, one like no other in the lifetime of anyone I know. Everyone’s daily life has been turned upside down. But there is no denying how differently our privilege or lack of it leaves some of us merely inconvenienced while others are dead because of underlying health conditions, front line jobs, or close living quarters. And those are just the virus-related issues. More people will die of hunger this year than of Covid-19. The toll of racism and white supremacy on the bodies and spirits of people of color cannot be calculated except as a huge, unpayable debt.

This is a sobering time, a rare but urgent chance to take personal stock and make changes in lifestyle. But more importantly, it is a chance to build structures that will benefit the common good—new ways to vote, economic reparations for past injustices, the removal of offensive iconography that celebrates some of the most hideous perpetrators of slavery-rooted racism and the colonialism that underlies it.

The United States of America, once a world leader in health, is now the country with the most Covid-19 cases in the world. At the same time, the US is withdrawing funding from the World Health Organization which works to combat disease, adopting a go-it-alone approach that is outdated by centuries. Federal leadership, beginning with those in the White House, simply must be replaced come November 2020.

This is, ironically, a hopeful time. It is as if a Jubilee Year were foisted upon us by nature and by the excesses of oppression and greed that we at WATER have long sought to eradicate. Nor are we blameless. As Chodron writes in the poem, “By holding ourselves and others responsible for our misdeeds, may we too hear the cries of the world.” We who can work at home rather than risk disease; we who as a majority white organization are part of systemic racism, and we who create a US-based project that benefits from capitalism, have work to do.

WATER is not in the business of false hopes. We exist to put feminist educational, moral, and spiritual resources to the service of the common good. We seize this moment of reckoning as a time of hope. ■

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



WATER Witness Deploring Racism and White Supremacy
June 1, 2020

The Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER) stands with all who deplore the systemic violence of racism and white supremacy. We condemn police actions that resulted in the brutal killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others. These instances, from microaggressions to murder, of the racist violence that we seek to eradicate.

Racism produces economic inequality, lack of access to education, substandard housing, and unemployment. White supremacy assures undeserved privilege for white people and guarantees that people of color, especially African Americans, will always have to work harder, be better, and still find

themselves vulnerable. These social evils have real physical and psychological consequences that are deadly for individuals and lethal for whole generations. This must end.

We recommit ourselves personally and organizationally to stem the tide of racist violence through education, activism, and alliance building. We urge our Alliance to act with all who work to dismantle this pernicious, pervasive system of racism and white supremacy that is corroding our nation’s moral foundation and destroying our social fabric. We can and we will do better.

Ritual: Bless Us with Creative Hope

By Diann L. Neu

Many people are weary from the uncertainties generated by the continuing rise of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the deplorable systemic violence of racism and white supremacy, economic suffering, and the devastating effects of climate change that threaten life on Earth. In the midst of the chaos of our world, we acknowledge our despair and hopelessness and yearn for signs of creative hope.

Centering Prayer

Light a candle.

God of Many Names,
Yahweh, Allah, Holy One, Divine Wisdom, Sophia,
Bless me with creative hope for my weary journey.
Bless us with hope to get us through these trying times.
Bless people in every nation with mercy, love, justice, and hope.

Listen to Hope

"Hope is a song in a weary throat."

Pauli Murray, title poem, *Dark Testament*, 1970

"Hope is a very unruly emotion."

Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 2019

"Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul

And sings the tune without the words

And never stops at all."

Emily Dickinson, in T.W. Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, eds.

Poems by Emily Dickinson (1861)

Reflect | Meditate | Journal

What are my sources of hope? What are my hopes and dreams for the future? What creative action will I do to bring creative hope to my weary journey and a troubled world?

Closing Prayer

God of Many Names,

Yahweh, Allah, Holy One, Divine Wisdom, Sophia,

Thank you for promising to bless us with hope.

Empower me/us to be hopeful as I/we act justly, love tenderly, and walk hopefully with you.

Amen. Ashe. Blessed Be.

Take Action for Hope

- Help a student access education through a virtual learning class or project.
- Provide basic survival needs of food, clothing, and toiletries to a neighborhood shelter.
- Make hearts and give them to your neighbors to put in their windows.

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In Memory of Her

Carolyn Farrell, BVM

November 2, 1934 — June 14, 2020

WATER extends deep sympathy to the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Farrell Family on the death of our longtime friend and colleague, Carolyn Farrell, BVM. We rejoice in the fullness and fruitfulness of her life of education, sisterhood, and friendship.

Carolyn was an educator from her earliest teaching in Catholic schools to her last contribution as the Director of the Roberta Kuhn Center, an adult education program at the BVM Motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa where she lived. She was the founding director of the Ann Ida Gannon Center for Women and

Leadership at Loyola University which was the next iteration of the congregation's Mundelein College. Carolyn educated as Mayor of Dubuque from 1980-1981, teaching as the first (and still only) woman mayor that women are fully capable of governing. It was only the Vatican's interference that kept her from further public service.

She was the embodiment of sisterhood. Carolyn served on countless committees and in various leadership capacities in her religious community. She led the BVM Women' Office, a vehicle for women's empowerment. She was active in the Women-Church Convergence, "a coalition of 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." Her commitment to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and her commitment to women's full participation in the Roman Catholic Church went hand in hand with her commitment to immigrants, racial justice, and human rights.

Carolyn was a friend's friend. She took her relationships seriously, valuing the many people from all walks of life with whom she interacted. No occasion was too small for Carolyn to send a card, note a birthday, encourage with a call. She was not a glad-handing politician, but a trusted, genuine companion to the many friends, including her family, who were lucky enough to be in her circles. Her signature pins that she wore virtually every day were often gifts from people who knew her stylish, upbeat, hopeful, living.

We at WATER treasured Carolyn. She educated us; she worked with us, and she was our dear and cherished friend. It is with heavy hearts that we bid adieu to her. We give deep thanks for her life. We take inspiration for the road ahead. We will "keep on keeping on" as you advised, Carolyn. And you can be sure that there will be "more later" as you always promised.

Summer 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. All programs will be over Zoom.

WATERtalks

In April, **Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw** shared their book *Intersectional Theology: An Introduction* which provides integral work on bringing the tool of intersectionality to theology. They invited us to examine our own intersecting identities and live into a complex, even messy theology.

In May, **Gina Hens-Piazza** gave a presentation entitled *Silence Breakers: Woman of Zion and the #MeToo Movement* exploring Lamentations 2:20-22. She provided insights into the ways that Woman Zion boldly names the abuse she faces and invites survivors to join her.

In June, **Kathleen Gallagher Elkins** introduced her book *Mary, Mother of Martyrs: How Motherhood Became Martyrdom in Early Christianity* comparing mothers in early Christianity with contemporary Maternal Activists. We discussed the ways that mothers are currently active and providing an important voice in the Black Lives Matter Movement.

In July, **Victoria Rue** shared an excerpt of her play *Maryam: A Woman of Bethlehem*, which explores women's stories in occupied Bethlehem. What a dynamic way to bring that troubled region's issue to the fore.

WATERrituals

In April, **Diann Neu, Techika Rhodes, and Laura Carr-Pries** invited us to *Return to Life for Earth Day*. We reflected on the beauty of Earth, while acknowledging the ways that we must take urgent action as we are in a climate crisis.

In May, **Diann Neu, Techika Rhodes, and Laura Carr-Pries** led a healing ritual entitled *You are the Salt of the Earth*. We imagined salt water rejuvenating and healing Earth, communities disproportionately affected by Covid-19, and those who are dying of Covid-19.

In June, **Diann Neu, Techika Rhodes and Laura Carr-Pries** called us to *Draw from Wisdom's Well*, as we sought wisdom from wise women. We asked how we will each draw upon Divine Wisdom during these uncertain times.

In July, **Diann Neu and Laura Carr-Pries** invited us to seek *Creative Hope* during these times of Covid-19, the ongoing violence of racism, and the reality of climate change. Together, we were inspired to action to make our visions concrete.

WATERmeditations

In April, **Cheryl Nichols** led us in a reflection entitled, *A Walk in the Desert*, where we reflected on images of the deserts, a prayer from Latin America, and words from Persian poet Rumi.

In May, **Mary E. Hunt** offered a *Swimming Meditation*, where we imagined ourselves moving through the water and being held by water, as we meditated together.

In June, **Phoebe Knopf** crafted a meditation on Hildegard of Bingen's *Viriditas: Holy Greening Power*. We were invited to rejoice, alongside Hildegard, in the sacredness of Earth and divine life force.

In July, **Cynthia Tootle** shared "*Sorrow and Hope: A Prayer to Kwan Yin*" by Venerable Thubten Chodron for our contemplation.



WATERtea: Connecting during the Pandemic

By Laura Carr-Pries

At the outset of our time staying at home in March, we began gathering for ***Tea at Two on Tuesdays*** as a new way to connect with one another during Covid-19. We sought to strengthen the WATER community during these times of physical distancing and discuss questions and challenges that are emerging during these historical times of the pandemic and the unmasking of White Supremacy and systemic racism. We have had people join from more than twenty countries, and valued coming together as a global community having new and challenging conversations.

We began in March by discussing *Pastoral Responses to Death and Dying* and congregational needs during the pandemic, with the conversation led by **Cindy Lapp and Cynthia Tootle**.

In April, we discussed our *Sources of Strength and Inspiration* with theologians **Rita Nakashima Brock, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Mary Condren**. We gathered seven women from around the world – **Rosemary Ganley (Canada), Judy Ress (Chile), Monica Maher (Ecuador), Maureen Martin (England) , Margaret Bolt (Jamaica), Margaret Maung (Myanmar), Ninna Edgardh (Sweden)** – and discussed *Global Responses to the Pandemic*. Additionally, we heard and reflected on *Feminist Musical Resources* with **Techika Rhodes, Ann Marie Szpakowska, Elizabeth Ursic, and Marsie Silvestro**.

In May, **Marie Fortune and Emily Cohen** led a discussion about the *Dynamics of Domestic and Sexual Violence during the Pandemic*, and provided us with a variety of resources for how to respond. With former WATER interns, **Heureuse Kaj, Mallory Naake, Dana Tufariello, Kali Ng, and Emily Neufeld**, in a conversation entitled, *Staying in Place, Moving Forward: Young Women of WATER Reflect on Covid-19*, we reflected on our experience of the pandemic and what we hope for moving forward. **Hannah Dorfman, Cheryl Nichols, and Patricia Lourdes Lao** reflected on *Spiritual Resources and Practices* that are sustaining them during these unprecedented times.

In June, we began with *Poetry*, where four poets – **Mary Ellen Chown, Phoebe Knopf, Marsie Silvestro, and Kathi Wolfe** – shared their poetry in the spirit of Audre Lorde's words, "Poetry is not a luxury." In light of ongoing police brutality and the Black Lives Matter protests, we had a discussion on *Racism and White Supremacy* led by **Lois M. Powell and Annabeth Roeschley**. We began to uncover the complexities of the broken systems and the many ways we can and need to move forward towards justice and equality. We continued the conversation by exploring the intersections of *LGBTQI+ Rights and Racism's Wrongs*, led by **Janie Spahr and Kelly Stewart**.

In July, **Rosemary Ganley, Kate Stoltzfus, and Mary E. Hunt** led a conversation about *Ways Forward: How Do We See the Road Ahead* and how we can build a more just society considering the inequalities the pandemic reveals.