



Photos from left to right: Tannaz Azimi, Saachi Sikaria, Catherine Li, Ally Jeffers, Eva Kennar, Emmett Moore, Marcella Hollero, and Hayley Burcher.

Service-Learning Student Volunteers Reflect on their WATER Work

In January, Michelle Mueller, former WATER intern and Professor of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University, and Kim Carfore, Adjunct Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at University of San Francisco, reached out to WATER about directing students virtually in their feminist theology classes. Looking at it as an experiment in what WATER can do, especially in a pandemic, we welcomed six students from SCU and two from USFCA.

Below are excerpts from their reflections on their WATER experience. We thank them for their flexibility, intuition, and hard, helpful work. We wish them the best.

Interning at WATER has been such an amazing experience! For the Meditation Project, Emmett and I gauged our understanding on the best new way to share the collection of WATERmeditations which are currently shared through audio recordings. We worked to transform these pieces into a mock-up book. We learned more about the importance and effectiveness of meditation.

–Tannaz Azimi

I attended a WATERmeditation and a WATERritual and got to hear from people who are from different walks of life. Growing up, my experience with rituals was that a priest would do the readings and we would do the actions. At WATER, people were assigned to read as part of the ritual. I got to read, and it made me feel like I was deeply involved instead of going through the motions.

–Saachi Sikaria

I attended a WATERtalk and WATERmeditation; after which I made a social media post about what I realized: gender inequality in religion is more than just in leadership positions; it is perpetuated in every aspect of society. I was unaware that even women’s theological work could be discredited or ignored. I appreciate nonprofit organizations and their hard work.

–Catherine Li

I had such a great experience interning with WATER this quarter and learned so much about what feminist theology looks like around the world. I now have a better understanding of WATER’s history and all the work they have accomplished, and I have learned of the importance of women taking charge and writing their own religious narratives.

–Ally Jeffers

As an engineering student, I have really come to value exposure to topics outside of my major that help shape me into a whole person. Through WATER, I received a new understanding of what religion can mean to me as a young adult woman. WATER fulfills a need for this rich community of religious women across the world who empower each other to make an impact through their religious beliefs.

–Eva Kennar

I had very little experience or knowledge on women within religion, or even what this subject could encompass, having grown up in a rather secular household. WATER was quite the introduction to religion as a whole and has taught me to always seek underrepresented viewpoints and ideologies.

–Emmett Moore

My time working with WATER was brief but so meaningful to me. Mary, Diann, and Anali truly inspire me with their passion for the work that they do. I am so grateful for this opportunity to work behind the scenes for WATER, in researching grants and putting together social media and fundraising plans. I am glad I’ve been able to contribute to the WATER community.

–Marcella Hollero

I updated an article about the origins and growth of WATER, FaithTrust Institute, and the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South. Through Mary’s insight and guidance, I have learned so much about the vast network of feminist theologians. The passion the women of WATER imbue into everything they do is palpable from hundreds of miles away.

–Hayley Burcher

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 | Anali Martin: Staff Associate | Emily Neufeld: Newsletter Staff | Joe Scinto and Cheryl Nichols: Volunteers

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

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Indebted to Our Colleagues, Empowered by their Leadership *By Mary E. Hunt*

WATER appreciates more fully after a pandemic year how much we rely on our colleagues in feminist studies in religion to shape the discourse and lead the way. I highlight two such groups, among the many around the world, to thank and congratulate them on outstanding accomplishments.

The Covid-19 pandemic did nothing to dampen the spirits or curtail the work of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership in Richmond, Virginia (www.upsem.edu/cwl/). Their April 2021 virtual conference, “The Hinges upon which the Future Swings: Womanism as a Gateway to our Future(s),” was as earthshaking as their founding 2018 conference.

Then, the late and beloved Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon realized her dream by creating a structure for the womanist movement. Now, her colleagues and successors, led by Center Director Rev. Melanie C. Jones, produced a stellar conference focused on six “high priority initiatives” of womanist work: Wellness, Witness, Wisdom, Worship, Wares, and Works. In a technologically sophisticated meeting, participants experienced first-rate preaching and cutting-edge theory, great music and a master chef cooking class.

Wellness included many forms of attention to bodies while Witness involved advocacy for those who are most marginalized in an unjust society. Wisdom abounded as scholars shared their perspectives on feminism versus womanism; sexual orientation and gender identity in womanist work; and challenging ethical ideas. Worship was woven throughout, capped by Rev. Dr. Renita Weems’ unforgettable sermon that included reflections on magic. Womanists asked hard questions about how to fund dreams and be social entrepreneurs through their Wares. The arts were threaded throughout with instrumental music and dance, demonstrating Works.

The Rev. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas riffed on Dr. Cannon’s famous dictum: “doing the work my soul must have.” She suggested that we need “the soul our work must have.” This meeting provided spirit in abundance, wrapped in brilliant analysis and erudite scholarship. Indeed, “the future is womanist.”



THE KATIE GENEVA CANNON
CENTER FOR WOMANIST LEADERSHIP

Another distinguished group active in the pandemic times is the Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAATM, www.panaawtm.org/). PANAATM’s mission is to “contribute to Asian and North American Asian women’s theology, mentor female leaders of faith communities, and engage in social transformation for justice.” They accomplish their mission with style and effectiveness, relying on experienced people to show the way while intentionally incorporating and promoting new colleagues.

PANAATM gathered virtually in April 2021 for their 35th conference, “Radical Reimagining, Fierce Surviving, and Collective Caring.” Sessions (available on their YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/c/PANAATM) built on decades of academic production. Rituals and workshops on mindfulness and rest parallel the womanist priority on wellness.

Benedictine Sr. Mary John Mananzan, longtime social justice advocate from the Philippines, corrected the common false dichotomy between prayer and activism: “A mystic is a prophet in contemplation. A prophet is a mystic in action.” PANAATM members showed themselves to be both as they gathered the strength and strategies to deal with violent anti-Asian sentiments in contemporary American society.

Another PANAATM program this season was a webinar that Su Yon Pak moderated entitled “Introducing Asian/North American LGBTIQ+ Networks.” With speakers from Japan, Hong Kong, and the U.S, this vital conversation is very helpful at a time of anti-queer backlash.

PANAATM is offering a very creative summer course, “Asian and Asian America Feminist Theologies: A Transnational Approach” with Professors Kwok Pui Lan, Gale Yee, Keun-Joo Christine Pae, and Boyung Lee. More than three hundred participants from around the world are enrolled in this innovative offering.

WATER is indebted to Womanist and PANAATM colleagues. We are grateful for their leadership. ■

© 2021 Mary E. Hunt is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), mhunt@hers.com



Blessing Same-Sex Couples *By Diann L. Neu with Mary E. Hunt*

The Vatican’s recent ban on same-sex blessings has caused many and varied responses worldwide in favor of such blessings. We, the WATER Community, rejoice in the love of all couples and in the abundant blessings which the Divine Creator showers on our world through them.

When people find one another as lifetime companions, they often want to gather family, friends, and colleagues to celebrate their good fortune. For some, their life partner is of the same sex or a non-binary person. They promise publicly to love as equal partners, cherish and respect one another, nurture each other’s personal and spiritual growth, create a family or community together, and work for a more just society.

Below are elements that could be used in a liturgy blessing a same-sex couple (or any couple for that matter), in holy unions, commitment ceremonies, and weddings. We invite you to use these pieces to design the liturgy you need. You can find the full script at www.waterwomensalliance.org/blessing-same-sex-couples-liturgy/



Call to Gather

This sacred hour, we come together to witness this ceremony of love and commitment between N. and N. Their love for one another, for each of us here, and for the broader community shows that love makes a difference in the world. Proclaiming love publicly is an act of courage. Thank you, N. and N., for inviting us to witness and bless your love. Our presence here for and with you is a sign of our support, our love, and our commitment to you as a couple. Feel the power of love today.

Opening Prayer

Source of All Being, Eternal Word, Spirit of Wisdom, Adonai, Gaia, Buddha, Yahweh, Vishnu, Allah, Wisdom Sophia, Cosmic Consciousness, Great Spirit, thank you for this day! Bless this occasion that brings us together to honor N. and N. Bless what we do and say here to reflect the sacredness of life. Bless all creation through this sign of love shown in N. and N.

Source of All Being, bless us on this day and always! Amen. Ashe. Let it be so.

Words of Reflection: “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” by Mary E. Hunt, excerpted, Full text can be found at www.waterwomensalliance.org/blessing-same-sex-couples-liturgy/

On behalf of all of us gathered, let me thank you two for inviting us to share in the goodness of your love.

Committing in love is a gutsy thing to do... In your case, commitment is made even more difficult by loving at a time when some people still don’t understand that love comes in many forms. Efforts to turn back legal marriage for all and trivializing same-sex love by the Vatican make it hard. Between those attitudes and the outcry of the Religious Right, it is amazing that you and other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary friends have the courage to trust your love, live it out, and more so, in this climate, to entrust it to the rest of us. Good for you!

...Love is what brought you together for reasons you’ll never fully understand and no one has a right to expect you to explain... Love is not a political matter at base, nor only a private one. Rather, love is the very essence of ourselves in community, which some like you have found and touched and hope to deepen together...

Thank you for standing before us today, giving love two beautiful faces so that we may see it in ourselves, in one another, and in our God forever. Love is indeed a miracle, and you embody this miracle. Treasure it well all the days of your lives.

Exchange of Vows

We as a community are here to witness and bless the love of N. and N. Come forward, N. and N., to speak your blessing to one another. *The couple face each other, join hands, and repeat in turn:*

On this day, I give you my heart, and promise you that I will look deep within myself and treasure my individuality. I will love you, respect you, listen to you, and cherish you. I will share my life with you in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health. I will work with you to bring about justice for our community and the cosmos. Hand in hand, across oceans and over mountains, wherever our journey takes us. Together. Forever.

Closing Blessing

N. and N., may your lives together be joyful and content, and may your love be as bright as the stars, as warm as the sun, as accepting as the ocean, and as enduring as the mountains.

May your heart hear more than words... listening to each other’s silences and exploring each other’s hopes.

May your love for each other pull you beyond yourselves into the hearts and lives of all those calling for justice, dignity, and love.

May you be blessed with wisdom to find the paths upon which you both may walk and with clear vision to keep sight of the grace that surrounds you.

May you continue to make your love clearly and truly a reflection of the infinite love that embraces us all.

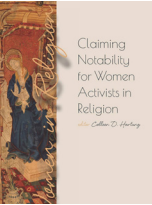
And may you, N. and N., be blessed in the name of the Source of Life who loves us into being, the Beloved who is the way of love, and the Spirit Wisdom whose burning love sets us free. Amen. Ashe. Let it be so.

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WATER Programs Highlights during the Pandemic

Our Alliance has proved itself truly international as we have connected via Zoom during the pandemic, with more than twenty countries represented. While our communities have been affected by Covid in different ways, we are able to gather across borders and time zones to share our experiences and enjoy each other’s virtual presence. Thank you to all who led and participated in these programs.

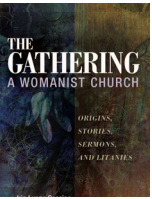
WATERtalks



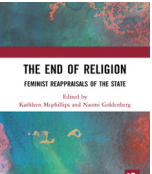
In February, **Colleen D. Hartung and Elizabeth Ursic** spoke on the book, *Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion*, an outcome of the “1000 Women in Religion” Wikipedia project. They emphasized the need for writing biographies of women in religion to reshape notability standards and increase representation.



In March, **Heidi Neumark**, Lutheran pastor in New York City, and author of *Sanctuary: Being Christian in the Wake of Trump* and **Cindy Lapp**, Mennonite pastor in Hyattsville, Maryland, had a conversation about the challenges and rewards of dismantling white supremacy and staying spiritually healthy during Covid-19.



In April, **the Rev. Dr. Irie Lynne Session, the Rev. Kamilah Hall Sharp, and the Rev. Dr. Jann Aldredge-Clanton** shared their experiences of the birth and development of the womanist faith community, The Gathering, outlined in their book *The Gathering, A Womanist Church: Origins, Stories, Sermons, and Litanies*.



In May, **Naomi Goldenberg and Kathleen McPhillips**, co-editors of *The End of Religion: Feminist Reappraisals of the State*, discussed how sexist oppressions are perpetuated by failing to understand how religion functions as a technology of contemporary statecraft.

WATERmeditations

In February, **Cheryl Nichols** used “A Blessing of Angels,” John O’Donohue’s poem, to reflect on angels in our lives guiding, healing, creating, and disrupting us.



In March, **Mary E. Hunt** introduced “Many Masks.” We contemplated masks in their ability to cover faces while revealing our political statements, fashion choices, emotions, care, compassion (or lack there-of), and privilege.



In April, **Rosemary Ganley** led us in “Accepting Diminishment” as we considered the passing of time and the meaning of our lives, looking to the wisdom of Teilhard de Chardin and listening to the hymn “Abide with Me.”



In May, **Virginia Day** used the Virginia Woolf quote, “Arrange whatever pieces come your way,” and live camera footage of osprey nests to reflect on what and how things “come our way.”



WATERrituals with Diann L. Neu and Anali North Martin



In February for Black History Month and anticipating Women’s History Month, the ritual on “Raising Up the Diversity of Women in Democracy,” from Diann’s book *Stirring WATERS: Feminist Liturgies for Justice*, celebrated the diverse women participating in democracy today.



In March, to hold up “Water to Make All Things New,” adapted from Diann’s book *Return Blessings: Ecofeminist Liturgies Renewing the Earth*, our community gave thanks and prayed for the precious, life-giving, and fought-over resource of water in light of the Spring Equinox in the Northern Hemisphere and World Water Day.



In April, “Finding Healing and Renewing Resilience” was the ritual for Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. We gathered to strengthen each other, recognizing the power of resilience while grieving with and for victims and survivors.



In May, “Remembering our Many Mothers,” adapted from *Stirring WATERS*, made space for the diversity of the experiences of motherhood, connecting through the joys, hurts, and struggles of the relationships to mothering figures in our lives.

WATERteas

In February, feminist theologian, author, and social activist **Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite** discussed the false news of our current “Information Apocalypse:” both technology’s and our own participation in it.



In March, **Rosemary B. Ganley**, our own Canadian RBG, guided the group in “Finding Your Voice and Then Using It,” reflecting joyfully on her authorial journey, specifically her book *Positive Community: Columns from The Peterborough Examiner 2015-2018*.



In April, **Laura Carr-Pries** (former WATER Intern), **Tammie Honore-Reaux, Damaris Gutierrez, and Biqiao Yin** from the Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution lead us in “Creating Brave Spaces.” We explored our identities as a first step toward engaging in the difficult conversations out of which come solutions in the pursuit of social justice.



In May, we took on the genre of film for “Let’s Go to the Movies.” **Margarita Suarez, Linda Pieczynski, and Dolly Pomerleau** started the conversation on movies as a way to educate, inform, and inspire.

