

# Litany for a Post-Pandemic World

By Diann L. Neu

Let us take time to name some of the ways the pandemic has shaped us. The response is “Restore and revive all creation,” and is indicated by **R**.

Loving Creator, have mercy on us. Holy Sustainer, receive our prayer. Wisdom Spirit, breath through us and the cosmos.

For what we learned and are still learning from the Covid-19 pandemic that is shaping us now and for the future, *Restore and revive all creation*.

For valuing the knowledge, wisdom, and stamina of scientists, doctors, nurses, caretakers, and all who are working on tests, vaccines, and treatments, and risking themselves to care for others, **R**.

For helping the weak, the elderly, those with compromised immune systems, those isolated and at the margins, those exhausted by the harsh pandemic; for supporting those who are treating and ministering with the sick, **R**.

For sharing patience and healing with those in quarantine and those who have contracted the virus, **R**.

For working to end racism, supremacy, poverty, homelessness, transphobia, sexism, and heterosexism, **R**.

For a deeper appreciation of essential workers, grocery clerks, teachers, and laborers exposed to illness as they do their work, **R**.

For working to end the death penalty, reverse climate change, and other ways in which humans take one another’s lives, **R**.

For treasuring time with family and friends, especially hugs, chats, and meals, **R**.

For appreciating how virtual gatherings keep our communities alive and connected, **R**.

For taking time to be with those who are scared and fearful, those who are overcome with anxiety and worry, **R**.

For supporting, helping, and comforting those who are worried about getting through this time financially, and whether they will have employment in the “new normal;” for the unemployed, under employed, and those unable to work, **R**.

For a growing call to protect the environment, **R**.

For a greater awareness that we can drive and shop less frequently; that we can survive and thrive with less, **R**.

For our ability to stay connected through technology, **R**.

For midwifing those who have died from Covid to their eternal rest, and for gathering into our arms those who grieve the loss of loved ones, **R**.

For our appreciation of the kindness of others, **R**.

*Add your prayer and response.*

Gracious and Loving Divine Grace, You are our comforter and our hope as we move into “a new normal.” Hear our prayers and our concerns. Strengthen us with integrity and equity. Inspire us to acts of solidarity and generosity, and give us hope for a brighter future. Amen. Ashe. May it be so.

© 2021 Diann L. Neu, is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), dneu@hers.com



## “Ruth Sent Us” By Mary E. Hunt

A wonderful sign at the 2021 Women’s March in Washington, DC summed it up: “Ruth Sent Us.” Indeed, she did. The late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg was a tireless advocate for women’s health, safety, and well-being –all of which are in peril at the moment. Her memory is both a blessing and a call to action.

Reproductive justice is rapidly being eroded in the United States. The result is a moral and medical emergency. Regardless of one’s view of abortion, the legal moves to outlaw it are highly problematic both in terms of a woman’s need for health care and a country’s respect for the rule of law. Deputizing vigilantes to report doctors, Uber drivers, and others who help women in Texas access health care should raise the hair on the back of people’s necks and motivate voters to race to the polls.

Texas, as a sage friend noted, is the canary in the coal mine, not an outlier. Changes are afoot with a Supreme Court that has the very real potential, read: votes, to repeal abortion rights. Trigger laws assure that, if Roe v. Wade is overturned, a number of states will close their facilities, leaving many women with few options. Rich pregnant women can travel, but poor and young women will be left to their own devices. Religious feminists need to take this with utter seriousness regardless of personal views of abortion. This is injustice plain and simple.

I noted at the religious service that kicked off the March (organized by Auburn Seminary with the capable leadership of Sharon Groves) a new level of nastiness. Jewish women rejoiced in being able to merge their faith with their politics by offering a Shabbat service for all. It was interrupted several times by screaming protesters. The intruders with bullhorns were especially rude when a female rabbi read from the Torah. Apparently, nothing is sacred. A dissenter bellowed: “she is not a real rabbi,” when in fact the rabbi is duly credentialed, and manifestly unflappable. The woman who read a powerful interfaith prayer urged people not to close their eyes as they prayed, but to keep them wide open since, as she said, there is so much to be vigilant about in the present climate. It was unnerving to note how women at prayer, especially women leading prayer, are such a trigger.

Attempts to control women’s bodies take many forms. I repeat, religious feminists need to take this seriously.

Americans have lived an uneasy truce on abortion since the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. Black women have changed the landscape by insisting on reproductive justice rather than reproductive choice. They point out wisely that the same liberty to terminate a pregnancy should apply to the freedom to bring a pregnancy to term. Available pre-natal care, fairly paid work, affordable housing, and other forms of material support are required for every woman to exercise the human right to make an informed and realistic choice about reproduction. Disgracefully, racism and white supremacy assure that for many women of color, and for some poor white women, these conditions do not apply. Reproductive justice understood in this way is well worth marching for, no matter what one thinks about abortion.

Shifting the focus from ‘choice’ to ‘justice’ produces far more overlap between those who approve of abortion and those who do not. It creates a multitude of opportunities to collaborate on sex education, birth control, anti-poverty work, anti-racism, child tax credits, and the like. The goal is to create a more equitable and welcoming society in which to make decisions about reproduction. Increasing control over women’s bodies and usurping women’s moral agency make that goal unattainable. RBG did her part. We need to do ours now. ■

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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](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org).

Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu: Co-directors | Liza Johnson: Staff Associate | Emily Neufeld: Newsletter Staff | Joe Scinto and Cheryl Nichols: Volunteers

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## Congratulations, Diann Neu!

*Stirring WATERS: Feminist Liturgies for Justice* by Diann L. Neu (Liturgical Press) received two honors from the Catholic Media Association's 2021 Book Awards: Second Place in the Liturgy category and Honorable Mention in the Gender Issues – Inclusion in the Church category. You can order your copy, or a gift copy from WATER [www.waterwomensalliance.org/shop/stirring-waters/](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org/shop/stirring-waters/)



# A WATER Welcome to Liza Johnson

We are delighted to introduce Liza Johnson to the WATER community. Through the Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Liza will be spending the 2021-2022 year at WATER as a Staff Associate.

Equipped with a double BA in Political Science and Scandinavian Studies from Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota, Liza brings an enthusiastic spirit to the WATER office and greater community. She is excited to explore both how faith-based nonprofits can utilize theology positively to affect the social-political realm, as well as how feminists are leading the way in creating spaces for dialogue and change. Liza, just like staff associates of the past, will be running the website and social media while helping to plan and run programs and communicate with WATER donors and community members.

WATER welcomes Liza and looks forward to an enriching, fun year!



## Reflection from a Mennonite Voluntary Service Intern By Anali North Martin

When I arrived to WATER's office for the first time in early September 2020, I was greeted at the door by Mary and Diann, masks on and temperatures checked. I felt undeniably welcomed. Despite the difficulties that arose from working during a pandemic and the precautions that Covid required, WATER became and remained a place of acceptance and both intentional and incidental education.

I have spent a year as an intern at WATER through Mennonite Voluntary Service, and it's been a year of endurance. Thanks to WATER, it's also been an opportunity for me to witness, participate in, and enjoy the offerings of feminist theology and community.

Community has been a highly-held value my whole life, especially by my church, university, friends, and family. And community was, for the most part, a very in-person experience: doing life together with face-to-face support. WATER was a fantastic introduction to a type of community that, pandemic or not, is always spread far and wide, connected virtually, through shared commitments to social justice, love for each other, and hope for the world.

Because of our programs via Zoom, I have been able to meet many of the fantastic people who are part of the WATER community. Not only have I personally been encouraged and supported by this Alliance and witnessed the sharing of each other's pain and joy, taking on each other's burdens and lifting each other up in prayer, but even more so, I have been inspired by the communal act of learning. Because of the emphasis put on connection and trust, I have seen members of the WATER community create brave spaces to get to the heart of matters of social justice, inequality, and oppression through accountability and vulnerability.

As I head into my next chapter, I leave with clarity on the kind of communities that are needed as we move forward. This isn't easy work, to be invested in stripping ourselves of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and classism, even and especially when it benefits us. Communities like WATER are where that work begins and is sustained through love, trust, compassion, and respect. This work requires the honesty and determination I've seen at WATER. WATER acknowledges both the head and the heart of matters, digging in to understand the issues and staying rooted in the passion for justice, supported by people who are just as invested.

I'm glad that, through WATER, I was able to participate in and aid this work, this community, for a year. I've seen the inner-workings of nonprofit management, been included in almost every part of the process from fundraising to social media to program planning and leading, and through that, I have gained a valuable combination of hard and soft skills. Even if I don't know what's coming next, I do know that I feel more prepared for it because of WATER, because of the experience I've gained and the muscles I've stretched. The pandemic has tested us all, and I'm glad WATER was where I was for that. This has been a uniquely edifying experience at a unique nonprofit, a unique community.

## Reflection from a Service-Learning Intern By Rowan Thistlethwaite, High School Summer Intern 2021

Overall, my time at WATER has been very informative. Everyone has been very helpful and very understanding. I enjoyed going to the various WATERtalks and other meetings, and I was able to learn much about feminist topics. I think that they are doing great work, and I would absolutely recommend them as a place to intern.

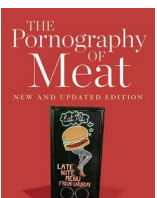
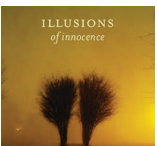
## Program Highlights for June and July, 2021

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. You can listen to the audio of them at [www.waterwomensalliance.org](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org) under Programs.

### WATERtalks

In June, **Carol J. Adams**, feminist scholar and activist, spoke on her book *The Pornography of Meat (New and Updated Edition, 2020)* and "The Misogyny We Don't Want to See" exploring the cultural construction of overlapping and interconnected oppressions, as well as the ethics of care.

In July, **Marcy Little** joined us to speak on *Illusions of Innocence*, reading from her book of reflection on racism aimed at a white audience.



### WATERrituals

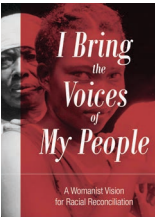
In June, we were "Grateful, Proud, and Connected for Pride Month" and celebrated the rights and achievements of same-sex-loving people in the ritual led by **Diann L. Neu**. LGBTQIA+ people have a powerful impact in their work on many struggles for justice, and we raised them up with pride during this liturgy.

In July, "Friendship Abounds" for the International Day of Friendship, and the ritual by **Diann L. Neu and Anali North Martin** recognized friendship as the gift it is, available to each of us and more precious than gold. We honored all friendships as provision of joy, comfort, and solidarity.

### WATERteas

In June, **Chanequa Walker-Barnes** shared "What White Feminists Need to Know about Intersectionality," correcting the many misconceptions and misuses of intersectionality, with discussion on the ins and outs of sustainable opposition to white supremacy well beyond traditional reconciliation.

In July, for "Give a Book, Get a Book-Virtually," members of the **WATER community** each brought a book that carried them through the pandemic, whatever the genre. In small groups, we exchanged recommendations and compiled a list to share: a book-exchange-turned-reading-revival.



### WATERmeditations

In June, **Anali North Martin** led a time of contemplation on "Tending to the Gardens" that are our lives, taking stock of the state of our gardens, of what has been planted, and what is bearing fruit.

In July, **Kye Flannery** brought the prompt of "Integration" to the group with the poem "Talking to Grief" by Denise Levertov.

### Collaborating with Colleagues Worldwide

- **Mary E. Hunt** provided critical analytic remarks during two seminars earlier in the year with the Mexican group *Tras las Huellas de Sophia* on women and ministry in the time of COVID, and women's voices in the international church.
- **Diann L. Neu** created and led the ritual for **WATER and Women of Dignity's** May liturgy and reflection for Mother's Day: "Wise, Generous, and Nurturing: A Time to Appreciate Women."
- Sharing their gifts of ritual and preaching **Diann and Mary** wrote the liturgy "Blessing Same-Sex Couples" in response to the Catholic Church's statement against blessing same-sex couples.
- In June, Pride Month, WATER partnered with **DignityUSA** for their Catholic Pride Blessing prayer service to affirm, encourage, and support the LGBTQ community.
- In June, Diann led an inclusive language seminar for **St. Margaret's Episcopal Church**.
- In July, Diann wrote the prayers for the **Providence Associates'** Day of Reflection.
- In July, Mary facilitated the **Roman Catholic WomenPriests-USA** National Council, "Maturing into the Mystery."
- Mary chairs the **American Academy of Religion** Committee on the Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession.
- Diann chairs the Spirituality Committee of the **Providence Associates**.
- Mary published articles for *Religion Dispatches* and the **Berkley Forum of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs** which have garnered much approval and discussion, and wrote the preface for Ofelia Ortega Suárez's book, *Cuban Feminist Theology: Visions and Praxis*.
- Diann has continued her work in spiritual direction and clergy supervision.
- Diann worked with the **Women's Ordination Conference** to plan their 45th Anniversary "Liturgy for Prophetic Persistence."

