

Ritual to Celebrate Women’s History Month *By Diann L. Neu*

March is National Women’s History Month and March 8th is the celebration of International Women’s Day. This is a month to thank women for sharing their unique gifts with the world. It is a chance to become those women.

Bless Women Worldwide

In solidarity with women around the world, we bless the four elements and directions: With you, Sisters of the South, we share the Fire of wisdom. (*Light a candle.*) With you, Sisters of the East, we share the Air of inspiration. (*Sound chimes.*) With you, Sisters of the North, we share the living soil of Earth. (*Place flowers.*) With you, Sisters of the West, we share life-giving Water. (*Pour water into a glass.*)

Thanks to Women

Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani activist and youngest Nobel Prize laureate, for defying the Taliban and demanding that girls be allowed to receive an education, *Thank you!*

Qiu Jin, Chinese feminist revolutionary executed in 1907, for fighting for the emancipation of women, and for starting your own feminist newspaper, *China Women’s News*, *Thank you!*

Claudette Colvin, Rosa Parks, and the brave women who sparked the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Thank you!

Sadako Sasaki, Japanese *hibakusha* “bomb-affected person” after Hiroshima, for folding one thousand origami cranes before your death, a symbol of the victims of nuclear warfare, *Thank you!*

Sally Ride, American engineer, physicist, and astronaut who became the first American woman and the third women overall in space in 1983, for showing the world, especially young girls, that women can reach for the stars and fly into space, *Thank you!*

Rigoberta Menchü Tum, K’iche’ political and human rights activist from Guatemala, for dedicating your life to publicizing the rights of Guatemala’s indigenous feminists and ethno-cultural reconciliation, and for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, *Thank you!*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian novelist and author, for giving a definition of feminism for the 21st century in your book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, *Thank you!*

Mary Daly, American radical lesbian feminist philosopher and theologian, for challenging us to move *Beyond God the Father*, *Thank you!*

Helen Keller, American author, political activist, and lecturer, for campaigning tirelessly on behalf of people who are physically challenged and for women’s suffrage, labor rights, socialism, and antimilitarism, *Thank you!*

Wangari Maathai, Kenyan ecologist who won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, for your contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace to reverse African deforestation, *Thank you!*

Mothers, Grandmothers, and all who have nurtured in every family and country, for shaping generations with your inspiration, *Thank you!*

Reflection

What did you hear in these stories that inspires you to inspire others? What do you do to inspire?

Act for Women

~ Write a letter or send an email to a woman who has guided you.

~ Advocate for women’s rights to move forward on issues such as reproductive justice, voting rights, and anti-racism.

Send Peace

Breathe deeply. Watch the candlelight. Sound the chimes. Smell the flowers. Drink the water. Send peace to women around the world. Blessings to you during Women’s History Month!

© 2022 *Diann L. Neu*, is Co-founder and Co-director of *Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)*, dneu@hers.com

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 North Martin: Tech Staff | Emily Neufeld: WATER*wheel* Staff | Joe Scinto and Cheryl Nichols: Volunteers

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Feminist Liberation Theologians’ Network: At 25 and Looking Ahead

By Mary E. Hunt

The 25th anniversary of the Network was a celebration of persistence against myriad odds. It had a festive feel, even on Zoom. In lieu of champagne, we had one another. If we had met in person with bubbles, some people could not have attended. To watch the meeting see: <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/feminist-liberation-theologians-network/>

Hosted by WATER and held in collaboration with the AAR/SBL Women’s Caucus, FLT^N began with a land acknowledgement. The group reflected in silence on the many people across the world on whose lands we sit. More than 60 people attended the meeting from more than a dozen countries including Germany, Australia, Ireland, Ecuador, the Philippines, Brasil, Canada, and the United States among others.

In 1995, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary E. Hunt convened a gathering of theologians and activists at the Women’s Ordination Conference’s meeting “Discipleship of Equals: Breaking Bread, Doing Justice.” The next year, 1996, Elisabeth and Mary offered an invitation to (1) bring U.S.-Canadian people together, (2) link colleagues across racial-ethnic lines, (3) explore and connect with other such groups around the world, and (4) engage with colleagues from various religious traditions.

Twenty-five years later, we still have much work to do on those four lofty goals. Yet, we rejoice in having produced very exciting sessions and brought many colleagues together. An estimated 1,250+ people (50 people on average at 25 meetings) have been involved, though some meetings have been bigger.

Activist-scholar Traci West of Drew University Theological School offered kind words about the Network and its leadership. She cited its “innovation, relevance, and capaciousness in a world context that too often shrinks, narrows, limits what we can know and imagine in relation to spiritual, intellectual, embodied, and political

bonds of unfreedom.”

She called FLT^N “intentionally transnational” moving beyond the U.S.-centric character of much American academic work. She insisted on including scholar activists from Africa; Black feminist work in religion is central to our common work. She affirmed that FLT^N has unabashedly “claimed space for centering the urgency of the political moment.” It is immersed in particularity. She talked about the repeated patterns that need deconstructing and how we create the tools to deconstruct class, race, and nation. Alliances can be fragile, superficial, and need more honest confrontation of differences.

Kathleen McPhillips of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle in Australia spoke of FLT^N as a networking community which has been helpful to her over the decades and now grounds her efforts to build similar community in her setting.

Her first FLT^N meeting in Boston in 1999 was where she deepened a sense of belonging in the field. At the 2005 *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* gathering in Boston she introduced her colleague Lee Miena Skye, the first feminist indigenous scholar of religion in Australia, to her wider circle. Now women in Australia have their own network where they share their own work on their own terms.

Kath described FLT^N as a warm and inviting if also challenging space. She called it a “deep root system traveling across expansive areas...a dynamic, moving, generous, safe space with multiple shoots across a range of projects and ideas” where activism on urgent issues by people in religious studies is the norm.

Elaine Nogueira-Godsey of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio in the U.S. brought her work on intersecting decolonial and ecofeminist perspectives to FLT^N.

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Thank you! Gracias! Danke! XièXiè! Merci! Arigato!
Your Generous Gifts Bring Hope and Challenge to WATER

We count on and are grateful for you and your support, especially in these challenging times. You make WATER programs and collaboration available to our Alliance. People from more than twenty-five countries join our monthly programs through Zoom. Your checks, PayPal donations, monthly gifts, IRA distributions, bequests, and more are the engines that make WATER work. Keep them coming! If we share, together we have enough. *Thank you!*



FLTN (continued from page 1)

Elaine Nogueira-Godsey of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio in the U.S. brought her work on intersecting decolonial and ecofeminist perspectives to FLTN. Originally from Brasil and living later in South Africa, she has long collaborated with and is now co-chair of the Women's Caucus team of the AAR/SBL.

Elaine described her FLTN experience as starting in 2016 when she had just arrived from South Africa. Donald Trump was newly elected. She attended the FLTN session where she heard Nami Kim speak about "Survival at No One's Expense." Suddenly, everything connected for her—we are part of systems in which some people survive at the expense of others. This should not be.

Her current work on "decolonial praxis," a combination of ecological and postcolonial thinking and acting, is a concrete effort to help people survive but not at the expense of others. Pedagogical methods to create spaces for compassion not guilt include cultivating dialogue practices that create a "beloved community." Students learn across differences, enter conversations with humility and openness. These approaches produce love and kindness as well as analyses and critical reflection. This is what FLTN can aspire to in the future.

Small group discussions led to many and varied suggestions for FLTN:

- *Deconstruct the world's religions
- *Include more women from Africa and the Caribbean
- *Nourish the nourishers
- *Confront white supremacy

There are many more years of work waiting to be done. FLTN persists creatively and constructively. *Ad multos annos.*

The next FLTN Zoom meeting will be in May 2022. The next in-person meeting is planned for AAR/SBL, Friday, November 18, 2022, 4-6 PM MT in Denver, Colorado, USA. Stay tuned for details. If you want to join send a note to water@hers.com.

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Elaine Donelson Program Fund

WATER is deeply grateful to the Estate of Elaine Donelson of East Lansing, Michigan for a generous gift that helps to fund WATER programs.

Elaine was a professor of Psychology at Michigan State University from 1966-1999. Among her many course offerings were Women and Religion, Psychology of Women, and Psychology of Religion. She was an early scholar of what is now women's studies, and a co-author of the book *Women: A Psychological Perspective* (1977).

Longtime WATER friend and collaborator Katherine Goehle of Sonoma, CA, was a close friend of Elaine's. She introduced Elaine to the work of WATER, noting our connection to some of Elaine's deepest commitments.

All WATER programs are free and open to everyone. Donations to WATER are needed and welcome. We socialize resources so those who can donate do so and those who cannot are equally welcome without distinction. **We believe that if we share, among us there is enough.** The Elaine Donelson Program Fund is a great help to make this so.

The Disturbing Challenges of COVID

By Mary E. Hunt

These two Covid years have changed everything and nothing. Zoom is now a member of most families, a staple for most organizations. On-line, virtual, digital, whatever the name, we seek human community, and, in WATER's case, global links, any way we can.

It is exhilarating to reflect on how far we have come in a short time to be able to beam each other up at will, see our faces, and share a cup of tea.

Still, what remains the same is deeply disturbing. Systemic racism, grinding poverty with food and water shortages, war, ecological disaster, and the arresting sexism, transphobia, and queer dismissal are all products of greed and entitlement.

The ability to communicate even during lockdowns does not guarantee that anything will change if the same people talk with one another. Despite helping us feel connected (no small feat) it can create the illusion of greater equality than exists, of more solidarity than is operative. Communication is but a first step.

We move ahead, developing plans for 2022 at WATER, and hoping to see the pandemic in the rearview mirror soon. More important, we remain on the lookout for those along the way who are marginalized by the powerful. They, and especially their children, retain the tightest claim on our resources until we dismantle the structures that oppress before, during, and after Covid.

Program Highlights for Fall 2021

Our Alliance proved itself truly international as we connected via Zoom during the pandemic, with more than twenty-five 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 and find notes of them at www.waterwomensalliance.org under Programs.

WATERtalks

In September, **Emma Goldberg**, researcher and writer at the *New York Times*, spoke on her book *Life on the Line: Young Doctors Come of Age in a Pandemic*. She follows six young doctors as they begin their careers in the midst of the Covid pandemic.

In October, **Gale A. Yee** joined to speak on "Thinking Intersectionally About Our Social Locations," drawing on her new book *Towards an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics: An Intersectional Anthology*. She provides clues for how we might more broadly understand our contexts in intersectional terms.

In November, **Kelly Denton-Borhaug**, professor at Moravian University, provided an overview of her work investigating "Military Moral Injury and Cultural Violence: Exploring the Intersections of Toxic Masculinities, Religion, and Ideologies of Nationalism in the U.S. Context."

WATERrituals

In September, we got a glimpse of what peacemakers throughout the ages have passed on to the generations that follow them. We challenged one another to become peacemakers by "Honoring Peacemakers for International Day of Peace" in the ritual led by **Diann L. Neu with Liza Johnson**.

In October, "Becoming Saints of Love and Justice" for All Saint's Day, the ritual by **Diann L. Neu with Liza Johnson** commemorated saints both known and unknown – people who are pushed to the margins, immigrants, trans people, queer siblings, children of mixed races, people who are differently abled, prophets, those who are brave, protesters, marchers, and others. We invited one another to be saints.

In November, **Diann L. Neu** led a ritual titled "Harvesting Gratitude" where we honored women of vision – from goddesses to biblical women, notable women in recorded herstory to the women in our personal lives – and expressed gratitude for wise women, holy ancestors, and supportive mentors.

In December, **Diann L. Neu** invited us to "Reimagine Mary as a Woman Today" by looking at the many faces of Mary and focusing on her as a symbol of those who are oppressed, forgotten, and in search of a home for their children.

WATERteas

In September, **Marian Ronan**, research professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary, discussed the concept of "Settler Colonialism-the Displacement of People," laying the groundwork for ongoing conversations about the destruction and death of native people in many settings.

In October, **Sheila Curran** of Dublin, Ireland shared about the "Industrial Schools: Complexity of the Irish Problem," highlighting the complicated role of religion, particularly the Catholic Church, and its relationship to the State.

In December, Canadian Deputy Minister **Gina Wilson** spoke about "Problems and Solutions to Injustice to Indigenous People in Canada." She lifted up the hard issues from a personal and political perspective. Her work is a powerful example of feminist spiritual and moral values put to the service of deep political and social change.

WATERmeditations

In September, **Mary E. Hunt** shared the poem "Blackberries" with the group from Margaret Atwood's new collection *Dearly*.

In October, **Margaret Ellen Burke** led a time of contemplation with the poem "To Live with the Spirit" by Jessica Powers.

In November, **Phoebe Knopf** used the poem "Cailleach's Greeting," with lovely illustrations to reflect on the Cailleach, a pre-Celtic goddess, known as the Hag of Winter.

In December, **Ann Marie Szpakowska** introduced Pauli Murray's poem, "Hope is a Song in a Weary Throat" as a springboard for contemplation.

WATER Collaboration

WATER is a member of the Women-Church Convergence. **Diann L. Neu** offered a session on "Feminist Liturgical Innovations." You can watch the video on WATER's website, www.waterwomensalliance.org

Mary E. Hunt finished her term as the Chair of the American Academy of Religion Status of LGBTIQ Persons in the Profession Committee.