

Hunting through the Archives *By Brooke Andrews*

One surprisingly significant task when working at a nonprofit like WATER is record keeping. After every program we hold, or event we partake in, there must be copies of the notes, attendance lists, photos, and emails. Mostly, this isn't a challenge, but it can take a lot of patience and a detailed eye to sort through it all. For the past couple months, that has been my job as I prepared WATER's documents to be stored away. We house our archived materials at the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, one of the largest collections of women's history in the United States. We like to think of ourselves sharing eternity with the likes of Gloria Steinem, Dorothy Height, Clara Barton, Judith Plaskow, Mary Daly, and so many other bold women.



The WATER archives provide a miniature history of the struggle for religiously-linked feminist and LGBTQ2S+ justice over the past 40 years. Therefore, sorting through piles upon piles of folders can lead to some pretty interesting discoveries. These include how WATER responded to major events including the AIDS epidemic, marriage equality, Black Lives Matter, and the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also letters and articles written by legendary theologians like Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether which tell the stories of how they came to form their radical and influential ideologies. I also handled ancient technologies such as DVDs and floppy disks.

If it isn't already clear, it was a pretty special experience for me to take on this assignment. Despite the weeks-long mess on my desk, and the monotony of sorting hundreds of files into chronological order, it became worthwhile as I discovered more and more valuable pieces of WATER's history. In doing this work, I came to appreciate how vital it is that this information is available for future generations of scholars and curious minds. We wish them all the best as they use our materials.

Brooke Andrews is a WATER Staff Associate and former WATER Intern. She recently graduated from the University of Maryland with a B.A. in English Literature.

WATER Essay Contest 2024

WATER delights in announcing the winners of the second WATER Essay Contest in the Style of Rosemary Ganley, "Feminists Change the World 650 Words at a Time." They each received a prize of \$650 for their articles. The winners (in alphabetical order) are:

Jim Ganley, "Your Cause, Your Joy, Your Team" ("Apple did not fall far from tree.") Find essay here: <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/your-cause-your-joy-your-team/>

M Jade Kaiser, "In Whom We Find Shelter: Choosing Communities of Care over Cultures of Surveillance". Find essay here: <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/in-whom-we-find-shelter/>

Catherine Ann Lombard, "Hoe to Harvest: Connecting Soil, Soul and Society". Find essay here: <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/hoe-to-harvest/>

This second year of the contest proved to be very compelling. Topics were timely, writing was crisp, and the messages were conveyed well. Read and see! It is good that this style of accessible writing is catching on for a broad audience.

WATER remains grateful to the generous donor who funded this project. We are in awe of and thank Rosemary Ganley whose tireless collaboration and boundless wisdom inspire us. Thanks to all who submitted essays. Your work matters and helps to transform the world.

Watch for details on the 2025 contest upcoming from WATER. Further information may be found on the WATER website <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/water-essay-contest/>

Who We Are

WATER is a global interreligious network, a non-profit educational center and public charity, a spiritual space, a center for dialogue on feminism, faith, and justice. We connect activists, religious leaders, students, scholars, and allies who are using feminist 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 forty 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 | Pamella Miller, Lisa Lauterbach, Brooke Andrews: Staff Associates | Emily Neufeld, Anali North Martin: Communications | Joe Scinto, Cheryl Nichols: Volunteers

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VOTE *By Mary E. Hunt*

Nothing says feminist theology, ethics, and ritual like voting. WATER's work of focusing feminist religious/spiritual values on social change makes voting an important activity, a civic responsibility. In the current moment in the US, it is a way to exercise a right that we who have it need to embrace for ourselves and for those who will be impacted but can't vote.

Theology comes to the fore as we bring our deepest convictions to the act of voting. Many people are praying, hoping against hope, for results that favor Earth, its inhabitants, and especially those who are poor or pregnant. Newly arrived immigrants do not vote, nor do Canadians or Mexicans in US elections. But to ignore the impact of the results on their lives is to bury one's head in the sand.

Ethics is the name of the voting game. If our checkbooks (now also our Zelle or PayPal accounts) are a reflection of our values, then voting is a way we make those values concrete. Specific people, parties, and propositions for whom/which we vote are the trail of breadcrumbs for those who follow.

Voting itself is a *ritual*. Some of us learned about it long before we were age-eligible by going with our parents to the polling place. OK, the PTA bake sales were a draw in my neighborhood. But between the brownies, we imbibed the singular importance of participating in this secular act of citizenship. My maternal grandmother went door to door for Catholic presidential candidate Al Smith, my mother in tow. Their 'ritual' changed my history.

I thought everyone voted. Wrong. Little did I learn until later of widespread voter suppression, especially targeting people of color. Nor did I ever hear that some people are excluded from the process because of prior felony convictions. Most



civilized countries make Election Day a holiday and/or hold it on a weekend. Not here.

It never occurred to me until I was voting age (it was 21 until 1971 when it became 18) that not everyone could waltz to their polling place, cast their vote, support the local PTA, and satisfy their sweet tooth all at the same time. Polling hours, typically 7 AM to 8 PM on a weekday, conflict with many people's work and family responsibilities. Absentee, mail-in, and early voting are recent innovations and are not available everywhere.

As a non-profit organization, WATER qua WATER cannot engage in electoral politics. Nor would it be proper to offer an endorsement for a party or candidate. But we must add our voices to the chorus in favor of voting and assuring that others, especially those who are marginalized, have the means to vote as well. ■

© 2024 Mary E. Hunt is Co-founder and Co-director of Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), mhunt@hers.com



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Election Prayer 2024 *By Diann L. Neu and Mary E. Hunt*

You have an important choice, consider carefully, and then
VOTE!

When democracy is threatened, take a stand, and then
VOTE!

Because you abhor violence, choose nonviolence, and then
VOTE!

When justice, choice, and freedom are on the line, clarify your commitments, and then
VOTE!

To unite the nation, to safeguard the world, get involved, and then
VOTE!

To maximize your impact, help others to the polls, and then
VOTE!



In Memory of Her

Letha Dawson Scanzoni

October 9, 1935 - January 9, 2024

A tireless pioneer of evangelical feminism and one of the great women of the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus, now called Christian Feminists Today. She was the co-author with Virginia Ramey Mollenkott of the

ground-breaking volume, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* Letha's legacy of scholarship, organizing, strategizing, and so much more will enrich future generations as much as she did her own.

Internship Reflection By Lisa Lauterbach, BVS/ Eirene Volunteer 2023- 2024



When I arrived at Washington National Airport in DC in the fall of 2023, I was relatively anxious, one might even say scared. After having been excited about moving and working abroad for months, the realization of what I had done finally settled in. Right after turning 18, I packed my life into two suitcases and left my hometown in Germany, and with it my family, my friends, and my community. What I had not yet realized while standing at the airport on that cloudy evening in October was that I was about to be welcomed by a new community, an alliance – the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER).

On my first day at the office, I was greeted open-heartedly by Mary and Diann. Surrounded by all the books in our library, I immediately felt comfortable. That very same day, a scholar came to visit WATER, and as I listened to the ideas exchanged over tea and cookies, I began to understand what a fantastic network of diverse, clever, open-minded people I had stumbled into.

This year exceeded all of my expectations! Within the past few months, I have gained a huge variety of skills. These include website programming, helping with funding, hosting our monthly educational Zoom programs, and connecting with people from our Alliance all over the world.

Most importantly, I learned that struggling for systemic change, justice, equality, and peace – the core values of WATER's mission - requires a lot of perseverance. Perseverance is what Mary and Diann have proven for over 40 years and which they have demonstrated with such inspiring conviction to me. Despite all the pushbacks, including raging wars in the Middle East and the continuing discrimination and humiliation of women and queer folks in the Catholic Church, they continue to stand up for their beliefs and advocate for marginalized people. I am thankful I was able to help this group work toward their goals for a year and gain so many enriching experiences on the way.

Looking back, WATER has helped me realize that fighting for justice is where my passion is. I am looking forward to engaging further in it by attending law school in the fall. I hope the determination I gathered this year fuels my motivation for studying and being a justice advocate.

Internship Reflection By Pamela Miller

The originator of the phrase "*When life gives you lemons, make lemonade*," is unknown, but it captures the resilience and resourcefulness of overcoming adversity. Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER) has shown me in a profound way how to make lemonade with the lemons that life gives me.

The story of two female Roman Catholic priests who were never accepted and formally ordained by their denomination has created this feminist nonprofit organization serving the entire world as its local parish. Dr. Diann Neu and Dr. Mary E. Hunt took their lemons of nonacceptance in the priesthood and made lemonade creating a fountain, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER).



They have quenched the thirst of countless women who have been marginalized by organized religious and other socio-economic and political groups. Their initiative has become a fountain of empowerment, providing a network for women in ministry and religious scholarship across various religions and advocating for those on the margins of society.

My ministry path is to serve the marginalized in the community, not to be in pulpit ministry. My internship at WATER fulfilled Wesley Theological Seminary's "Practice in Ministry and Mission" (PM&M) and equipped me with invaluable resources to pursue my ministry mission goal. I was not sure if WATER was a fit for my ministry mission goal of finding resources to prevent youth who aged out of the foster-care system from falling prey to human trafficking and sex trafficking.

My learning partners and staff at WATER guided me to an enormous network of resources in people and organizations working to assist foster children and to end human trafficking.

At WATER I experienced true ministry as I engaged in a vibrant community of diverse religious faiths, showing love to all creation by respecting and supporting each other in a shared mission of compassion and justice. While theoretical courses at seminary provided essential knowledge, my time at WATER immersed me in hands-on ministry, particularly highlighting the contributions of women in advancing theological discourse and community service. The organization's emphasis on practical engagement and empowerment resonated deeply with my desire to serve God by addressing societal injustices on a broader scale.

WATER has not only equipped me with practical tools and networks to pursue my ministry goals, but it has also broadened my perspective on what it means to serve and advocate for marginalized communities. It has been a transformative experience that continues to shape my approach to ministry, emphasizing inclusivity, justice, and the profound impact of grassroots initiatives in fostering positive social change.

In Memory of Her

Mary Collins, OSB

September 16, 1935 – May 2, 2024

Benedictine Sister of Atchison, Kansas, liturgical theologian, associate professor of Religion and Religious Education at Catholic University in Washington, DC. Mary was part of the early work of WATER. She knew that spirituality, especially ritual, was a key component of theological change. We are grateful for her wisdom shared so generously that continues to inspire us.



Program Highlights for April - July 2024

Thank you to all who led and participated in these Zoom programs. We had people from more than 20 countries join us! You can find video, audio, and notes at www.waterwomensalliance.org under Programs.

WATERtalks

In April, Brite Divinity School Professor Dr. Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein introduced her 2023 book, *"The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Ecumenism, Feminism, and Communal Practice."* Dr. Oredein also spoke about her own approach to theology as she continues in the tradition of Mercy Oduyoye, a world-renowned theologian and one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

WATERrituals

In April, we honored the 14th century Italian mystic, prophet, activist St. Catherine of Siena, one of the first women Doctors of the Church. We told her story and called one another to "*Set the World on Fire like Catherine of Siena*" by serving neighbors, advocating for justice, challenging abuses of power, and working for reform, reconciliation, and healing.



In May's ritual, "*Walk in Beauty*" we were reminded of the beauty of the cosmos that surrounds all of humanity, especially these days. We praised the beauty of Earth, and promised to protect it so that Earth can be beautiful beyond seven generations.



In June, our ritual was "*Celebrate Juneteenth Honoring Grandmother Opal Lee.*" Black activist Opal Lee, the grandmother of Juneteenth, had a vision of June 19th as a holiday for everyone. This day reminds that though the African American experience includes the brutal chains of slavery, emancipation did come to create "freedom for all."



In July, our ritual, "*The Saving Grace of Fun,*" reminded us that the summer season offers a grace-filled time for vacations, relaxation, fun, leisure, recreation, and renewal – even in places where work never seems to stop. It is a saving grace. We offered a break for those who were exhausted by discussing justice issues, and we took time to recognize and lift up fun as an integral part of salvation, to see it as a human right. We also blessed our current interns as they finished their time at WATER.



WATER and Women of Dignity in Collaboration

In April, Episcopal priest Rev. Linda M. Kaufman and Dignity Executive Director Marianne Duddy Burke shed light on "*Rainbow Railroad,*" a project that supports LGBTQ2S+ immigrants in the United States. Linda is part of the Washington, DC area group providing help with housing and work. Marianne offered remarks on immigration issues as they are compounded for LGBTQ2S+ people.



WATERmeditations

In April, Lillian Lewis offered her thoughts on "*Roadkill, The Blessing*" leading us in a wonderful meditation that brought new angles on blessings. She referred us to her book "*Psalms and Dancing Asanas to the Great Mother*" which is now available to the WATER community.



In May, Corbin Hannah (they/them), a Sister of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana and social worker, invited us all "*To Be Whole.*" Corbin has spent the last 3 1/2 years cultivating resilience and allowing healing from a traumatic brain injury.



In June, Pamela Miller, a native Jamaican, shared thoughts on being "*Nurtured by the Sea*" as a springboard for meditation. Pamela spent two years at WATER in a practicum for her recently received Master of Divinity degree at Wesley Theological Seminary.



In July, Sister of Mercy Jeanne Christensen, shared insights on how exploited women, victims of human trafficking, reflect on and regard God: "*God Is Everywhere, Takes All Forms, Has Many Names and Is in All of Us.*" Their experiences set the tone for our meditation. Jeanne is a social worker by training and has been active as a minister and advocate against human trafficking in the Midwest since 2011.



WATERtea

In May, Dying with Dignity Canada speakers Bina Feldman, an adult educator, and Mary Anne Cecutti, a health care consultant, provided an overview of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), how it became legal in Canada, and what's next on the legislative side. In "Exploring Medical Assistance in Dying," they outlined eligibility criteria as well as application and assessment processes. This is useful for people from many countries as we learn from Canadians about dealing sensibly and sensitively with death.



Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network

In June, our FLTN colleagues got together on Zoom to catch up on the year's events. Australian theologian Michelle Eastwood updated us on the Australian referendum. Justice Revival Executive Director Allyson McKinney reported on the struggle for the US Equal Rights Amendment. Mary Yelenick, Main Representative of Pax Christi International to the United Nations, reflected on feminist non-violence in light of current wars. Group discussions involved everyone.



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