

Dear Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, January 22, 2025

The Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER) thanks and commends you for your excellent service and sermon at *A Service of Prayer for the Nation* on January 21, 2025. The Cathedral truly functioned as “A House of Prayer for all People” and you led the way with a message of unity and mercy. The nation is in your debt.

We applaud your forthright message. Immigrants, as well as Gay, Lesbian, and Trans people, along with others who are marginalized by those in power, tremble in the face of policies and Executive Orders that dehumanize all of us. Thank you for making public and explicit the expectation of this nation that all persons will be treated with dignity and respect regardless of status.

You modeled what religious leaders do, namely, unite people for the common good. We your siblings in ministry, education, and activism stand with and around you, wishing you every blessing and protection as you continue your stalwart and fruitful ministry.

Sincerely with gratitude,
Mary E. Hunt, Diann L. Neu, Magdalena Mueller, Wed Naji, WATER Co-directors and Staff



Prayer: Holding the Line, Expanding the Circle ~ In a Time of Repression

By Diann L. Neu

- To LGBTQIA+ and non-binary friends who share joys and sorrows, the circle of friendship to you.
- To people living in war-torn countries who experience violence from war, rape, and religion, the circle of peace, safety, and restitution to you.
- To families divided by differences, the circle of reconciliation to you.
- To children of every race, family, and country, the circle of love and protection to you.
- To people in despair, the circle of hope to you.
- To those who have no job, the circle of remunerative work to you.
- To those who experience discrimination in any form, the circle of justice to you.
- To the elected leaders of every country, the circle of vision, truth, and mercy for the global community to you.

© 2025 Diann L. Neu is Co-founder and Co-director of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), dneu@hers.com

WATER Essay Contest 2025 “Feminists Change the World 650 Words at a Time”

Deadline: Submit your Essay by April 1, 2025 to waterstaff@hers.com.

The WATER Essay Contest invites writers at all stages to submit 650 well-chosen words on a topic related to feminist work for social change that springs from spiritual commitments. Politics and the arts, sports, religion and spirituality, local and global happenings are all fair game. So, too, are ecological themes and humor. Your imagination and activist priorities are the only limits. For wonderful examples, see Rosemary’s blog: <https://yellowdragonflypress.weebly.com/columns>.

For Guidelines, Registration Information Contact Form, and past Essay Contest Winners go to <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/programs/water-essay-contest/> Up to three writers will receive \$650 each for their successful essays.

- Rosemary Ganley advises:
- Make it accessible to a general reader, the people who read “secular” but not necessarily religious sources, like daily newspapers and blogs.
 - Research carefully and make a clear argument.
 - Convey a sense of calm and hope.
 - Skip the “God talk” and let justice, fairness, decency, and democracy carry the day.
 - Spiritual values and images will be evident in creative ways.
 - Wit welcome.

Sharpen your pencils, or just hit keys on your computer, WATER’s 2025 Rosemary Ganley Essay Contest has just started!



What Did You Do? By Mary E. Hunt

As constitutional challenges unfold in the moral morass of the United States of America in 2025, social and personal unrest abound. Immigrants are frightened of deportation; government workers fear loss of jobs; the rest of us are knocked off center by the wholesale changes unfolding to the detriment of the global common good. We who live and work in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia) are Ground Zero with many neighbors and colleagues at high risk. Friends in other countries see the ripple effect.

So far, there have been myriad firings and the dismantling of government agencies. Then came the takeover of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts by a person who has never been to a performance there. Next up was the National Parks Service erasing ‘Transgender’ from its Stonewall National Monument website, as if drag queens never fought back. Erasure is a form of genocide. Not to be outdone, the National Security Agency copped to the Defense Department’s dictum to erase personal pronouns from email signatures and purge words including ‘racism,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘injustice,’ ‘intersectionality,’ and ‘equality’ from its website.

In a misguided effort to comply before being forced, someone in the National Cryptologic Museum in Fort Meade, Maryland, reportedly papered over displays of pioneering women and people of color in national intelligence work. Once word got out, administrators acknowledged the “mistake” and the exhibits returned to normal, at least for now. But it was a chilling reminder that dictators rely on self-censorship by the populace to accomplish a lot of their goals.

Just when we need all feminist hands on deck, former president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America Cecile Richards died too young of a brain tumor. Her mourning family released a statement shortly after her death including this helpful directive: “If you’d like to celebrate Cecile today, we invite you to put on some New Orleans jazz, gather with friends and family over a good meal, and remember something she said a lot over the last year: “It’s not hard to imagine future generations one day asking:

‘When there was so much at stake for our country, what did you do? The only acceptable answer is: ‘Everything we could.’” Amen to that.

Episcopal Bishop Marianne Edgar Budde wasted no time on the day after the second Trump inauguration. In direct address to the President, she will long be remembered for saying: “*In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now.*”

Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of American Elizabeth A. Eaton struck the same chord in a January 28, 2025 statement. Mincing no words, she wrote: “Among the policy changes to which our church’s social teaching objects include: Orders to suspend all refugee resettlement. New and sweeping enforcement priorities. The summons of military personnel to the border. The decision to revoke special guidance regarding enforcement activity at or near sacred or protected places.”

In a February 13, 2025 *New York Times* ad, 350 rabbis and other prominent Reform and Conservative Jewish leaders proclaimed: “Trump has called for the removal of all Palestinians from Gaza. Jewish people say NO to ethnic cleansing!” They have seen this process play out catastrophically before. Never again means not ever again.

WATER commits to solid programming to educate for justice. We open our doors to people who need a safe space to meet. We sign on to amicus briefs contesting unjust decisions. We pledge to collaborate with other groups resisting the onslaught. We offer spiritual resources. We will be on the streets as necessary. We will spend our privilege in service of those whose survival is at stake.

There is no one right way to respond to the egregious erosion of our social fabric. There are many tasks and the trajectory is long. What will you do? ■

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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 over 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 | Magdalena Mueller, Wed Naji: Staff Associates | Emily Neufeld, Anali North Martin: Communications | Joe Scinto, Cheryl Nichols: Volunteers

WATER is a 501(c)3 organization. All donations are tax deductible. We thank you for your support.

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Congratulations Julia Watts Belser, Rabbi, Scholar, and Disability Advocate, for Receiving the 2025 Grawemeyer Award for Religion

Julia’s WATERtalk on her award-winning book *Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole* can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-2PSsXBMpc>. The notes, including introduction and discussion points, can be found at <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/2023-tertalk-with-julia-watts-belser/>. Let celebrations begin. Make change happen.



In Memory of Her: Sister Theresa Kane, RSM (1936-2024)

On September 4th, FutureChurch with WATER and other co-sponsors hosted a virtual celebration of life for Sister Theresa Kane. Over 400 people remembered, honored, and gave thanks for this extraordinary woman, leader, friend, and visionary.



In addition to singing, praying, and reflecting on Scripture, we heard tributes and remembrances from **Sr. Christine Schenk CSJ**, Founding Executive Director of FutureChurch and author of *To Speak the Truth in Love: A Biography of Theresa Kane*; **Kate McElwee**, Executive Director of Women's Ordination Conference; and **Mary E. Hunt PhD**, WATER. **Diann L. Neu, DMin**, WATER, prayed the Mercy Suscipe.

A great woman whose good works endure. Theresa Kane, Presente!

The recording can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVamnPBU_vc&t=3s&ab_channel=FutureChurch.

Get to Know Our WATER Interns

WATER is delighted to introduce our 2024-2025 Interns, Magdalena Müller and Wed Naji! Both are from Germany and are with the peace programs Brethren Volunteer Service and Eirene.

Magdalena Müller comes from Thüringen in Germany. She graduated from the University of Göttingen with a B.A. in Political Science and English. She completed her studies during her Eirene voluntary year in Morocco where she worked at a nonprofit advocating for women's and children's rights, and taught English to high school dropouts. In her free time, Magdalena enjoys making music and reading about different social issues.

Wed Naji was born in Yemen and grew up in Bonn, Germany. She graduated from high school in 2024 and is having new experiences at the WATER office and in Washington, DC before she begins university studies. She was an active member of the social-democratic youth party in Germany, advocating for social change and young voices getting heard in politics. Wed likes to educate herself on various political topics in her free time and loves cooking for her housemates.



Program Highlights for September - December 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.

The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven
Revised and Expanded with Anniversary Edition

DARLENE O'DELL

WATERtalks

In September, WATER celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the momentous ordinations of women in the Episcopal Church by inviting Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, the Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward, author Darlene O'Dell, and filmmaker Margo Guernsey to a thoughtful conversation. "The Impact of Women's Ordination on the Episcopal Church Fifty Years Ago and Now" was instructive for people of many faith traditions.

WATERmeditations

In October, Nancy Sylvester introduced her book, *Journey-Faith in an Entangled World*, to the WATER community. She spoke about different experiences of the Divine. She taught how to reflect and evolve in the understanding of oneself in the often complex and fraught world. Her book informs WATERmeditations.

WATERrituals

Grace Y. Kao invited us in November to discuss her new book, *My Body, Their Baby: A Progressive Christian Vision for Surrogacy*. In light of the Dobbs decision, Vatican statements, and Italy's ban on international surrogacy important life decisions are threatened. Grace, Professor of Ethics at Claremont School of Theology, opened a crucial conversation which is still in early stages but promises to be central to future reproductive justice.

Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network (FLTN)

In December, WATER welcomed Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite to talk about her new mystery novel *Surfacing: A Kristen Ginelli Mystery*. She focused on women's fear and trauma after the 2024 elections. Fiction is a powerful medium for robust conversation, education, and social change. Susan does it well.

Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network (FLTN)

At the FLTN Meeting in November, Mary E. Hunt led a discussion about how "Elections Have Consequences." Melanie Jones Quarles, Director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership at Union Presbyterian Seminary; Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, professor and president emerita at Chicago Theological Seminary; Rita Nakashima Brock, Senior Vice President for Moral Injury Programs at Volunteers of America; and Janice McRandal of the University of Divinity in Australia shared their perspectives in an effort to sketch out the national and global input of the US elections. The group has tall work ahead!

WATERmeditations

Cheryl Nichols invited us to a spiritual reflection in September using the work of the late Benedictine Mary Lou Kownacki, "Sr. Mary Lou Kownacki and Roykan: Between Two Souls".

WATERrituals

Jeanne Christensen talked about the overflow of "Decisions, Decisions, Decisions" in October, and helped us to reflect on what influences our decision-making and our priorities.

WATERrituals

In November, Rosemary B. Ganley invited the WATER community to come together the evening before US Election Day to manifest and gather positive energies. The Canadian activist/author reminded us to focus on companionship at liminal times.

WATERrituals

Kate Moody helped participants to look at and connect with their inner light in December. The WATER community is committed to new ways forward despite the obstacles.

WATER Out and About in Collaboration in Late 2024

September, Takoma Metaphysical Chapel, MD
Cynthia Tootle, longtime WATER colleague and neighbor, invited Diann Neu to speak with her congregation about "Peace of the Changing Seasons" to honor the Fall Equinox and prepare for the upcoming US elections. They talked about changing seasons in our lives and what this time teaches about peace, resistance, and balance.

October, Mary's Pence October, Grantee Gathering, Minneapolis, MN
Mary's Pence held their Grantee Gathering October 20-23, 2024 at Mount Olivet Conference and Retreat Center. WATER was among the grantees represented. Magdalena Mueller, Wed Naji, and Diann Neu connected with non-profit leaders who engage in social justice in the US, Central, and South America. Thank you Mary's Pence for making this incredible and inspiring experience possible.

October, Rosemary Ganley Award, Ottawa Canada
Mary and Diann flew to Ottawa, Canada to celebrate Dr. Rosemary Burns Ganley, writer, activist, and teacher. She was named a Member of the Order of Canada for her lifelong advocacy for human rights, gender equity, and social justice. Congratulations, Rosemary! You show us the way!

December, Nora School Students Visit the WATER Office
WATER had the honor of welcoming high school students from Nora School civics class into our office. While enjoying cookies and apple cider, they learned how a non-profit is run, what feminist theology means, how to develop programs, and how WATER impacts the lives of many.

They had many questions about WATER's history and what drives us forward. Together, we brainstormed how we can reach new, and especially younger audiences. A special thanks to their teacher, Jeff Goodman, for encouraging students to learn about and support local non-profits. We look forward to seeing these familiar faces in our programs and even roaming about our library!

