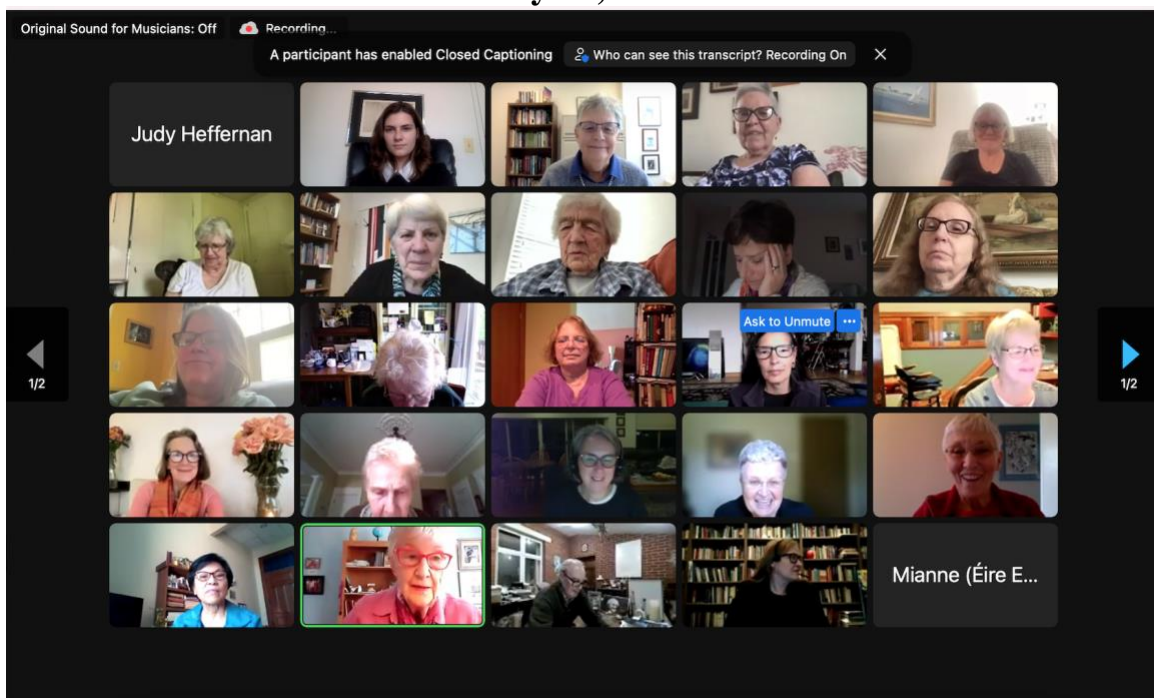


# Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Chronology 2023-Present as of 6.20.2024

## 2023 Zoom Meeting Report:

### Report on Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Mid-Year Meeting

Mary E. Hunt  
May 10, 2023



The video of this meeting can be found at: <https://youtu.be/NnhYL6CTLS0>

The Mid-Year meeting of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network was held on-line on May 10, 2023 with more than forty attendees from more than seven countries (including Ecuador, Ireland, Australia, England, Germany, Canada, among others). It was a chance to meet colleagues, hear two stimulating reports, and look ahead together. FLTN, sponsored by WATER, collaborates with the Women's Caucus of the AAR/SBL.

We began with a land acknowledgement, WATER being situated on the land of the Piscataway and Anacostan people. We continued with introductions in small groups, putting a priority on meeting colleagues from different parts of the world who collaborate across generations to make feminist liberation theology a useful reality.

## PRESENTATIONS:

1. *Monica Maher on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN and on collaborating with Kichwa women in Ecuador in their new School of Indigenous Medicine.*

Monica Maher, PhD, is a theo-ethicist who was WATER's first intern more than 35 years ago. She is now an ordained United Church of Christ minister, a Buddhist teacher, a graduate school teacher, part of the Grail working on peace and justice issues in Ecuador. She is the Founding Director of the Ecuadorean Faith Network, which does interfaith advocacy for sexual and reproductive rights.

Monica's talk focused on activism and advocacy, at the international and the local level. It was feminist liberation theology in action. She highlighted the voices of indigenous women of the Andean region, beginning with a young Kichwa poet, Tswaywa Samay Cañamar Maldonado:

~~~ Knock at my door and let us travel between mountains and white doves.

On the way, the black jaguar of the rocks will greet you, you will tell her of the mountain woman you carry inside, the wool cloths of grandmother mountain will cover you, you will come down with the rain, you will run in the eyes of the water, you will love each scent, texture and color of the wakas.

...The shouting from outside will fall into the sacred water, it will go away with the flowers which flow with the river. You will walk with the wisdom of the moon, you will sit around an altar together with your own, your shadows, your desires, your fears. You samay, will return to yourself, to your rhythm, to your time.<sup>1</sup> ~~~

Monica attend the recent 22nd UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, where the Grail, an international women's organization, and UFER, United for Equity and Ending Racism, sponsored a parallel trilingual event called Hitarishun, Kichwa for Together for Tomorrow, with six women indigenous leaders from Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and the US.

Monica lifted up the voices of some of the women. For example, she said

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<sup>1</sup> Tswaywa Samay Cañamar Maldonado, *Shunku-yay / Mirarse en la eternidad del corazón* (Siwar Mayu, Ecuador: 2022). Translation from Spanish by Mónica A. Maher. *Wakas* are sacred spaces.

“Sofía Chipana Quispe, Aymara Theologian from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, opened the panel with poetic words about, ‘Relational spiritualities as roads of healing the body-land territory’. Body-land territory is a conceptual political proposal of indigenous community feminism, first articulated by Lorena Cabnal, of the Maya-Xinka peoples of Guatemala. Sofía Chipana addressed the need to heal body territories and land territories of Andean communities through opening to the warm embodied embrace of healing memories of justice and millennial struggle. Sofía spoke of ancestral wisdom and spirituality as ways of life which recognize relations of reciprocity between peoples and the diverse sacred forces of nature, and urged recognition of the plurality of religious and spiritual experiences of the Americas.”

Monica reported on a talk by Jhajayra Machoa Mendúa, of the Cofán peoples of the plurinational state of Ecuador. Jhajayra “offered moving words about her commitment to continue to protect ancestral land territories, key to the survival of her people. She spoke with strength amidst her grief for her uncle, Eduardo Mendúa, who was recently assassinated for his activism to defend the forests.” Many lands rights defenders in Latin America have suffered similar assassinations as incursions on ancestral lands are common. Helping us understand this situation through the words of indigenous women is a way to center their voices.

Monica paired the international work with her involvement with the School of Ancestral Medicine in Cotacachi in the Andean highlands of Ecuador, an initiative of the women’s collective, Jambi Mascari, Searching for Health in Kichwa.

She said: “The school is a dream long held by the women leaders, particularly the School’s Director, midwife Martha Aritongo. With others, she helped launch the school almost two years ago, in order to address obstetric violence and transmit ancestral knowledge and spirituality to the next generation of women. Eleven students began studying with women elders. Topics include plant medicine, ceremonies, ritual baths, midwifery and dreams. Currently, nine women are carrying out practical internships in the outlying rural communities with an elder mentor. On the International Day of Midwives, the School held a celebration to affirm the importance of ancestral midwifery. It began with students leading a traditional Andean ceremony.”

Monic concluded: “In the words of Samay:

~~~ We are also spirit that mutates within air, fire, wind, water, mother earth.

An infinite force that very few of us manage to experience fully. ~~~

“The efforts of Andean women, both at the international and local level, to affirm and strengthen their ancestral wisdom and spirituality, is an integral part of their human rights struggle to protect life in all its forms in the face of climate injustice and extractive industries. The InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations are increasingly bringing attention to the right of indigenous communities to preserve and practice their ancestral spiritualities as part of the right to freedom of religion and belief. The right to spirituality is inseparable from the right to cultural identity, the right to water- land -body territories, the collective right to exist, to live free of violence and to flourish as a people in harmony with all other living beings.”

These are some of the images Monica shared:

Parallel event  
**UN PERMANENT FORUM ON  
INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII22)**

**U.F.E.R.**  
UNITED FOR EQUITY AND  
ENDING RACISM



**Sofia Nicolasa Chipana Quispe**  
*Amayra theologian (Bolivia)*



**Ninari Chimba Santillan**  
*Activist, eco-feminist (Ecuador)*



**Theresa Dardar**  
*Elder and leader Pointe-au-Chien tribe (USA)*



**Patricia Matias Lopez**  
*Coordinator of a project for differently-abled indigenous (Mexico)*



**Airy Gavião**  
*Indigenous Rights activist (Brasil)*



**Jhajayra Idalia Machoa Mendúa**  
*Niece of forest defender Eduardo Mendúa (Ecuador)*

**LINK HERE**

**Together for Tomorrow**  
TUESDAY, APRIL 18  
10:30 AM TO 12:00PM EST





The poetry of Samay:

~~~ I Am Vital Energy

I am vital energy.  
One that grows moving.  
I am strength and confluence. A renewed energy  
standing up  
and exploding.

My life is the spiral of the past  
and what comes ahead  
tied up by the wisdom of a Condor.

I am the heart of the wind  
that nurtures your vital energy  
and makes the tremors of fear  
sound gently.  
I am like a spiritual song  
touching all the memories of the universe.

I have the beauty of a fresh water spring of quiet mountains  
vast and exalted lands  
and silence.

I am young and beautiful.  
I go on clothed by the land. Moving on and on.<sup>2</sup> ~~~

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<sup>2</sup> Cañamar, Shunku-yay. Translation from Kichwa by Fredy A. Roncalla.

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A link to some of Samay's poetry translated into English:

<http://siwarmayu.com/shunku-yay-looking-at-each-other-through-the-infinite-of-the-heart-tsaywa-samay-canamar-m/> <<http://siwarmayu.com/shunku-yay-looking-at-each-other-through-the-infinite-of-the-heart-tsaywa-samay-canamar-m/>

## II. Tracy McEwan on the *International Survey of Catholic Women*

**Tracy McEwan, Ph.D.** is an Australian feminist theologian.

She and her University of Newcastle colleague Kathleen McPhillips headed a landmark study of Catholic women worldwide, the *International Survey of Catholic Women* (ISCW). Their findings offer concrete data about Catholic women's views on a patriarchal church. They analyzed 17,200 responses from women in 104 countries.

Tracy recently presented Pope Francis with his own personal copy of the report. And, she slipped under the report a copy of *Australian Women Preach 2023. In Her Voice: Raising Women's Voices in Preaching the Gospel*, Melbourne, Australia: Garratt Publishing, 2023 for his edification.

Tracy's presentation, which is based on the report which can be accessed at <https://nova.newcastle.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/uon:48018>, is another wonderful example of what feminist liberation theology looks like in the real world. It is best captured in the following slides:

## **International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW)**

- Commissioned by Catholic Women Speak Network in 2021
- Open between 8 March – 29 April 2022
- Sept 2022 – summary report submitted to the upcoming Vatican Synod on Synodality
- March 2023 – in depth report published with key findings and recommendations.

1

## **Analysis and report of key findings**

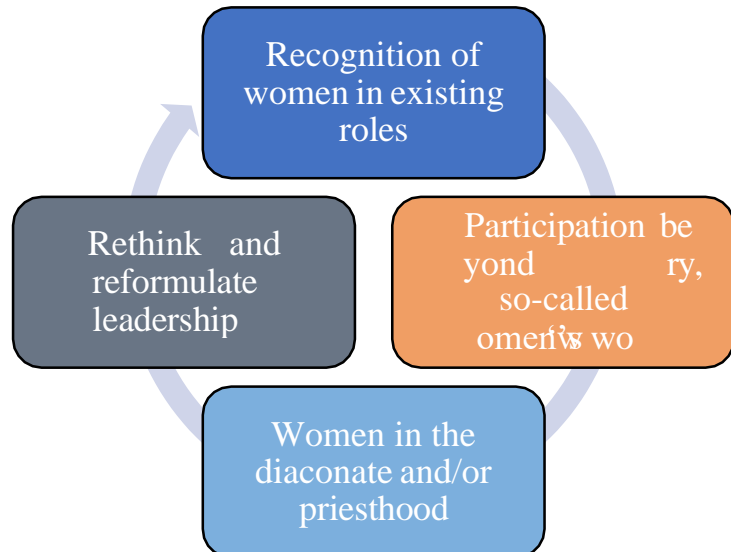
- Analysis of data using quantitative and qualitative methods
- 20 Main findings
- 14 Recommendations
- Presented to Pope Francis on IWD 2023
- Respondents had a strong sense of Catholic identity yet reported feeling frustrated
- Some respondents disclosed experiences of harm.



## A snapshot of Catholic women

3

## What might the full inclusion of women in leadership look like?



4



Is it really moral or ethical to stand behind an organization that has such huge flaws and covers up such horrific crimes like the abuse of children?  
(18 to 25 years, Germany)

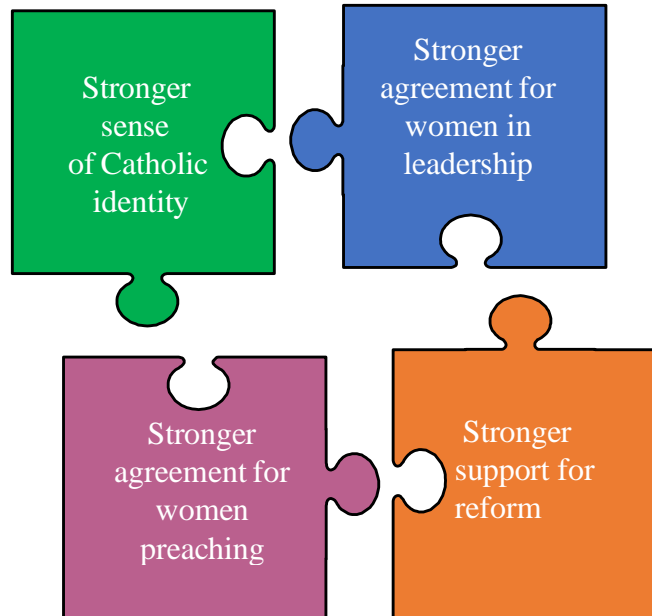
I love being Catholic ... but I am ashamed of the lack of an energetic and categorical condemnation of sexual and power abuses  
(26 to 40 years, Peru).

**The Catholic Church needs to do more to address sexual abuse, abuses of power, and spiritual harm**

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**Responses from the Global South compared to whole cohort**



6

## Acknowledgements

- Dr Kathleen McPhillips, University of Newcastle, Australia, Professor Emerita Tina Beattie, University of Roehampton, London, Dr Miriam Pepper, University of Newcastle and Charles Sturt University, Australia and Kiana Ninness, University of Newcastle, Australia.
- The ISCW respondents for their generosity in sharing their insights and experiences.
- Funding support from Voices of Faith and the Fidel Götz Foundation.
- Support in Australia and Rome from Her Excellency Chiara Porro, Australian Ambassador to the Holy See.
- Photo credit to Vatican Media and Joel Muniz on Unsplash.com

Tracy told a powerful, data driven story that captures Catholic women's experiences as never before surveyed. The conclusions, detailed in the report, speak for themselves. The use of quantitative data means that it is impossible to deny the depth and breadth of Catholic women's dissatisfaction with a patriarchal church.

Likewise, it is clear that a clerical church with women in the mix is not what women want. More than 80% of respondents noted the negative impact of clericalism, and many, especially older women, were emphatic about wanting new models of church.

The use of open and closed questions allowed the voices of women themselves to emerge. Tracy presented the written report in person to Pope Francis, along with a book on women preaching that might also open his eyes. It was feminist liberation theology in action if ever it were!

### REFLECTION:

Both presentations showcased the kind of work FLTN members are engaged in around the world. They also highlighted the need to hear women's voices on their own terms. Both speakers are scholar activists, their activism clear in Monica's involvement with the medical education and Tracy's with Catholic women in Australia especially Women and the

Australian Church. WATCA has published Catholic women's preaching in churches that are generally unwelcoming of such voices.

#### QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1. How do these two examples of Feminist Liberation Theology in action relate to your work? What are you doing that is connected in some direct way with the needs of an unjust world?
2. As the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network moves ahead, what are some key issues we need to consider that are both timely and impactful in the ways that Monica and Tracy have modeled?

#### FLTN IN ACTION:

*What FLTN folks are doing that is related to the kind of work showcased by the speakers:*

- Creation of new relationships of solidarity
- Call for a women's international strike
- Use of art in social change as in the example of Australian women planting ribbons to represent abuse survivors Newcastle
- Need for Spanish translation for this and other similar meetings to broaden participations
- How to ensure that ritual work is not appropriating culturally specific content
- Work people are doing in local settings
- Anti-racism in local churches
- Preaching in churches that have not heard women before
- Queer, postcolonial work
- Celebrating lesbians globally

- Local church sharing space with a congregation of refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo who stood against sexual violence as a tool of war in Congo
- Facilitating information on gender identity with people who know nothing about it
- Feminist spiritual direction
- Theological education with women
- Refugee and anti-racism work in Ireland
- Liturgical ministry
- Education about the role of U.S. military as a major polluter
- New relationships with indigenous people in Canada

#### KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE FLTN WORK

*What are some key issues we need to consider that are both timely and impactful as modeled by the speakers?*

- Environmental justice
- Intercultural honoring
- Migration, gender, religion

Please send additional suggestions for speakers and topics for next year to [mhunt@hers.com](mailto:mhunt@hers.com)

THANK YOU to our speakers, Monica Maher and Tracy McEwan, and to Patrice Rupp for technical support.

The next meeting of the FLTN will be in San Antonio, TX on Friday, November 17, 2023 from 4-6 PM in conjunction with the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Watch also for Women's Caucus sessions in the AAR/SBL Program.

Meanwhile, use the Google list to share information with one another (for information on how to join the list write to [waterstaff@hers.com](mailto:waterstaff@hers.com)) and

consult our website [www.waterwomensalliance.org](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org) for other WATER programs to which you are cordially welcome.

**Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Report  
Annual Meeting, November 17, 2023,  
San Antonio, TX**

**By Mary E. Hunt, Convener,  
Codirector of WATER,  
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual**

The Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network held its 27<sup>th</sup> annual gathering in San Antonio, TX in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion/ Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting on Friday, November 17, 2023. The session was co-sponsored by the AAR/SBL Women's Caucus and preceded a Caucus session the next day on three new works—on rape by Danielle Tumminio, on disability by Lisa Powell, and on surrogacy by Grace Kao, to which Mary E. Hunt presented the response.

More than thirty-five colleagues from at least seven countries convened at a time when wars raged in the Middle East as well as between Ukraine and Russia. These were heavy on our hearts such that getting together for sustained conversation with people from several parts of the world was welcome.

We began with a Land Acknowledgement using the Canadian data base Native-Land <https://native-land.ca/> which gives the information by zip code of those whose land it is: "In the area of 78205 you are on Jumanos, Coahuiltecan, Ndé Kónitsaąáí Gokíyaa (Lipan Apache), and Tonkawa land."

We did our customary introductions, hearing from each participant about their starting point and one thing that makes the AAR/SBL a meaningful place for them for the exchange of ideas.

We turned to our dual agenda, first a discussion of the Australian "Voices" Referendum which was "Whether to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice," and then to a conversation about the war in the Middle East.

Michele Eastwood, Director of Research at Australian Lutheran College, Executive Director for ANZATS, The Australiana and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies, led the way. She provided a very useful overview and analysis of the recent "Voices" referendum. Michele's remarks are at the end of this report. We are grateful to her for the information and insights.

The Referendum failed for reasons that were all too familiar, especially racism. Confusion over the wording was also cited. Certain generational divides accrued, such that young people in urban areas voted in favor more than other sectors of the population. Next steps in this complicated process are not clear. Meanwhile, discrimination persists. FLTN will follow this important issue, perhaps with a short report at our May 2024 Zoom Meeting.

The second part of our meeting centered on the war in the Middle East. We did not have a naïve sense that we could do anything from this remove. We brought the realism that is rooted in self-understanding. We began to identify for ourselves and in conversation where we start on this matter—where we are located, with whom we are allied, and how we see the situation in all of its complexity, especially with regard to women, children, and female-identified persons. Then we began to imagine how we might be useful: what tools and insights from feminisms, liberationist work, and theologies might be unique and relevant resources for trying to have meaningful conversations especially with people who see these matters differently.

Earnest and enthusiastic conversation ensued in small groups. A deeper sense of WHY people hold the view they hold does not change our own views, but it helps pave the way toward meaningful conversation. We tried to humanize not homogenize the conversation.

We observed that women and children always suffer in war despite many religions' claims to protect them. Lip service about their care is common; rape, abuse, and worse are more often the order of the day.

We explored the various forms of essentialism that are part of conversations about war. Does “never again” have any time limits? Does it include “never again to anyone”? Does being something—woman, man, Jew, Muslim—‘obligate’ people to certain perspectives? How do we negotiate the contradictions?

Obviously we did not solve anything. But, unlike some other conversations about war that end in impasse, we came away with a deeper sense of one another's views, and a deeper appreciation for how people hold views we cannot even imagine. This meta conversation helped to illuminate how we might move forward.

Our colleague Ulrike Auga ([www.ulrikeauga.com](http://www.ulrikeauga.com)) made the following suggestions for reading:

--Auga, Ulrike; Braun, Christina von (eds.), *Gender in Conflicts. Palestine – Israel Germany*, Berlin / Münster / Wien / Zürich / London: LIT 2006.

--Auga, Ulrike; Braun, Christina von; Bruns, Claudia; Husmann, Jana (eds.), *Fundamentalism and Gender: Scripture – Body – Community*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock 2013.

**The next FLTN meeting will be in May 2024 on Zoom. The next in-person meeting will be at the AAR/SBL in San Diego, CA on Friday, November 22, 2024 from 4-6 PM PST. The themes will be announced.**

**Please send your suggestions for themes and speakers as soon as possible to Mary E Hunt ([mhunt@hers.com](mailto:mhunt@hers.com)).**

Thanks to Diann Neu for videoing the meeting, and to all who participated, especially Michele Eastwood whose very helpful remarks follow.

Michele Eastwood

FLTN Presentation SBL 2023

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Payaya people of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation. I would also like to acknowledge that I work, write and play on the unceded and sovereign lands of the Waddawurrung people of the Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to any Indigenous people here in the room today and acknowledge their care of the land over many thousands of years.

In October, citizens of the country now called Australia were required to vote in a referendum to change our constitution in order to include an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. The Voice, as it is colloquially known, was a proposed consultative body comprised of democratically elected Indigenous people who would provide advice for the government which was limited to issues that impact Indigenous people. As Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, reassured a fearful and conservative public, the Voice would be an advisory committee only and would not have any capacity to enact laws in and of itself. However, the referendum failed with not one state voting in support of it.<sup>3</sup> Only the Australian Capital Territory voted yes, and the state of Victoria came next closest with 45% support. The Australian Capital Territory, or ACT, is the home to the nation's capital and is overrepresented by people who are highly education and younger – the very demographic most likely to vote yes. The ACT has a long history of being more socially progressive than other areas, although as a territory, it doesn't have the same voting weight in referenda that the states do.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this presentation, I will make reference to the lands now called Australia, this phrase coined by Wakka Wakka woman, Brooke Prentis, acknowledges that the nation-state of

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<sup>3</sup> For full results see:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/elections/referendum/2023/results?filter=all&sort=az&state=all&party=all>

<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of Canberra's progressive social history see: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/apr/30/how-canberra-became-a-progressive-paradise-and-a-housing-hell>



Australia is a colonial imposition on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land where sovereignty has never been ceded.<sup>5</sup>

So, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been living on the lands now called Australia for an estimated 65,000 years.<sup>6</sup> They are considered the oldest continuing living culture in the world, and their wisdom and traditions have helped them to thrive across the diversity of lands that make up our island continent.<sup>7</sup> The first known European contact with this land occurred in 1606, by Dutch sailors with Spanish boats following soon after.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch sailors explored the western and southern coasts and called the land “New Holland.”

The land, however, remained un-colonised until the arrival of the British First Fleet in 1786, at which point a pattern of invasion, colonisation and genocide led to the widescale destruction of Indigenous populations through direct killing and the more indirect introduction of disease, alongside dispossession of lands and removal of children. The Aboriginal people who survived were often rounded up onto missions where all aspects of their lives were controlled. These experiences are starting to be revealed through the works of people such as Larissa Behrendt<sup>9</sup>, Chelsea Watego<sup>10</sup>, Claire Coleman<sup>11</sup> and other indigenous writers and scholars.<sup>12</sup> One of the things revealed by the referendum debates was a distinct lack of knowledge about the atrocities committed against the First Nations people, and the way systemic discrimination continues today and the consequential ongoing trauma and its impacts.

In 1967 a successful referendum was held that for the first time acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as citizens of the nation-state that is Australia.<sup>13</sup> On 26 January, 1972 four Aboriginal men – Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Tony Coorey and Bertie Williams

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about Brooke Prentis, see: <https://www.brookeprentis.com/about>

<sup>6</sup> For more information see: <https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/evidence-first-peoples>

<sup>7</sup> For more information see: <https://www.natgeokids.com/au/discover/history/general-history/aboriginal-australian-culture/>

<sup>8</sup> A brief overview of recorded interactions between Dutch and other European sailors with the Indigenous people of the lands now called Australia can be found here: <https://dutchaustralianculturalcentre.com.au/news/first-contacts-between-the-dutch-and-the-aboriginal-people/>

<sup>9</sup> Larissa Behrendt is the author of a range of titles including *After Story*, *Finding Eliza*, *Home*, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Relations*, *Achieving Social Justice* and *Indigenous Australia for Dummies*. A full list of her works and achievements can be found here: <https://www.larissabehrendt.com.au/>

<sup>10</sup> Professor Chelsea Watego is the author of *Another Day in the Colony* which examines the continuing racism that First Nations people face in contemporary Australia. More information can be found here: <https://www.uqp.com.au/books/another-day-in-the-colony>

<sup>11</sup> Clare Coleman is the author of *Enclave*, *Lies Damned Lies*, *The Old Lie*, and *Terra Nullius*. More information about Clare and her work can be found here: <https://clairegcoleman.com/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Other Indigenous writers from the lands now called Australia include: Bruce Pascoe (*Dark Emu*, *Found, Loving Country*); Bill Gamage (*The Biggest Estate on Earth*, *First Knoweldges*, *The Broken Years*, *Dunera Lives*) and Kim Scott (*Taboo*, *That Deadman Dance*, *True Country*).

<sup>13</sup> For more information about the 1967 referendum see: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/1967-referendum>

arrived in Canberra – Australia’s capital city – to establish an Aboriginal Embassy.<sup>14</sup> The embassy consisted of a beach umbrella on the lawn in front of Parliament House, although the umbrella was replaced soon after by several tents, prompting the current name of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. This was the beginning of the longest continuous protest for Indigenous land rights in the world. The date – 26 January - is important to note because this has been known as Australia Day for some years now, marking the arrival of the first fleet (a group of 11 convict ships from Britain) into what is now known as Port Jackson.<sup>15</sup> More recently, in response to growing protests and unrests, January 26 is now commonly referred to as Invasion Day with increasing numbers of local and state government bodies choosing not to hold citizenship and other celebrations on this day as acts of solidarity with and for the First Nations people of the land.<sup>16</sup>

In 2017, a petition by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders leaders called the Uluru Statement from the Heart was submitted to the Australian Government calling for reforms to recognise the continuing sovereignty of Indigenous people in the lands now called Australia and to address the structural and systemic barriers facing First Nations people.<sup>17</sup> The Uluru Statement called for the Voice as well as a Makarrata Commission to oversee the process of treaties with the diverse Indigenous groups across these lands now called Australia and to establish a truth-telling process about the history and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These processes are more simply known as Voice, Treaty and Truth.

As noted, the Voice is the first of these to be proposed on a national level; although, there are current treaty negotiations being held across the nation, in recognition that no Indigenous tribe can speak for another and so treaties – in the plural – are being negotiated at the local and state level with the traditional owners of the local lands. In the wake of the referendum defeat, some of these treaty negotiations have already been scaled back.

I think it is worth noting that in 1993 the Native Title Act was established which theoretically gave Indigenous peoples recognition of their connection to the land. However, the reality is that Native Title has been hard to prove and undermined by mining and other business interests.<sup>18</sup>

It's also worth considering that Australia is a relatively conservative nation. For a referendum to succeed, a majority of people overall must vote in favour as well as a majority of the states, this is called a double majority. Within the history of the Australian colony, there have been 45 referenda, the first being held in 1906.<sup>19</sup> Of those, only 8 have been passed.

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, see: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/a-short-history-of-the-aboriginal-tent-embassy/>

<sup>15</sup> Australia Day was first used by all the states and territories (except NSW) to refer to the 26<sup>th</sup> January in 1935. NSW joined in the naming of Australia Day in 1946. It was only in 1994 that all states and territories began to consistently observe a public holiday on this day. For more information see: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/australia-day-invasion-day>

<sup>16</sup> Invasion Day (also known as Survival Day) has been marked by marches, protests and celebrations of Indigenous culture since 1938. For more information see: [https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Annual\\_Days/Invasion\\_Day](https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/Annual_Days/Invasion_Day)

<sup>17</sup> The full Statement From the Heart and other information can be found here: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

<sup>18</sup> For more information about the Native Title Act, see: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/about-native-title>

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed overview of referenda held in the lands now called Australia, see: <https://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/files/past-referenda-fact-sheet.pdf>

The explanations given for the failure of this referendum are diverse<sup>20</sup>: some note that it was driven by racism and the ongoing nature of these lands as a white, colonial project. Some say it was a failure of the yes campaign to clearly articulate their vision. Some opposition to the Voice came from Indigenous leaders themselves – some who opposed the Voice in favour of black Sovereignty, and some who have argued that colonisation has actually been good for the Indigenous people.

The sad reality is that this defeat has emboldened racists, shown there is not widescale political good-will towards supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and probably means there won't be another opportunity to set this right for many years to come.

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## **Report on Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Mid-Year Meeting June 11, 2024**

**Report by Mary E. Hunt**

**VIDEO:** The video of this meeting can be found at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCosTbQc43o&t=18s&ab\\_channel=WATERwomensalliance](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCosTbQc43o&t=18s&ab_channel=WATERwomensalliance)

The Mid-Year meeting of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network was held online on June 11, 2024 with more than forty attendees from more than seven countries (including Ireland, Australia, Germany, Canada, the Philippines, Sweden, USA, among others). It was a chance to meet colleagues, hear two informative reports and a challenging presentation on feminism and non-violence.

We began with a land acknowledgement. WATER is situated on the land of the Piscataway and Anacostan people. Other participants' locations were acknowledged in the chat.

We continued with introductions. This is often a favorite time at the in-person meeting when we go around a big circle. We replicated that

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<sup>20</sup> A range of analyses of the failure of the Voice referendum can be found here:

- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-16/why-the-voice-failed/102978962>
- <https://www.spectator.com.au/2023/10/five-key-failures-that-sank-the-voice/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/commentisfree/2023/oct/16/voice-referendum-aftermath-civics-yes-campaign-no-campaign>
- <https://mumbrella.com.au/why-is-the-yes-voice-campaign-failing-so-badly-802638>

process in small groups on Zoom. What a great way to meet colleagues!  
We moved on to presentations.

## PRESENTATIONS

**1. Michelle Eastwood from Geelong, Australia, brought us up to date on the Australian Referendum on aboriginal rights which was defeated last year. Michelle reported on this at our November 2023 meeting (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsIHy5-zvHM&t=26s>).**

Of late, there are some efforts to create treaties with various aboriginal groups. There has been a Truth Telling Commission with Anglican, Uniting, and Catholic Church representatives. The Catholic officials were, according to Michelle, appalling in their denial of any negative behavior by the Catholic institution against aboriginal people; the other two denominations were more honest about their complicity.

There has recently been a Reconciliation Week. This year it was themed “Now more than ever” with only more liberal people participating. There are no national holidays in Australia focused on indigenous rights despite the continued celebration of special days for the British monarchy. On the good news front, Western Australia is giving 8% of its land back to indigenous people. In sum, there is slow progress with churches no better than the rest of society when it comes to justice for indigenous people.

*Suggested Actions:* For those who are so inclined, pray. Learn about indigenous issues across the world. Check out NAITTS (formerly the North American Institute for Indigenous Studies) which is “dedicated to the development of increased theological capacity in the Indigenous community.”

This is an issue we will follow over time to see how progress is made, how backlash strikes, and what other countries can learn from Australia’s efforts.

**Flash of Good News:** The Templeton Prize for Religion in 2024 went to an esteemed colleague, South African psychologist Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, for her work on reconciliation and forgiveness in the aftermath of apartheid. Her books include the highly acclaimed *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (2003). FLTN congratulates her!

**2. The second report was on the long-stalled Equal Rights Amendment in the U.S. Allyson McKinney Timm, who is trained both in law and theology and ordained as a Presbyterian Elder, is the director of Justice Revival ([www.justicerevival.org/era](http://www.justicerevival.org/era)).**

The following fact sheet from Justice Revival is a useful summary of her remarks.

She concluded with remarks about #Faith4ERA and Justice Revival as part of interfaith efforts to bring about equality for all.

We look forward to hearing more from Allyson as we watch this issue now in its second century without success. Her work is a good example of the nexus of feminist theological concerns with on-the-ground political action.

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Securing Equality with  
the Equal Rights Amendment



*What is the ERA?*

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

The purpose of the ERA is to ensure equality under the law, a core principle of human rights and a healthy democracy.



*What impact would the ERA have?*

The ERA will provide women and LGBTQ+ Americans with equal citizenship status for the first time in U.S. history, empowering Congress and the courts to uphold their rights.



The ERA will authorize Congress to pass laws to address sexual and domestic violence, pregnancy and pay discrimination, maternal mortality, and other injustices. Currently, Congress lacks the power to adequately respond to these pressing problems.

The ERA will also prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, which will guide how courts interpret the law.

#### *What is the status of the ERA today?*

The ERA has met the rigorous requirements to become a constitutional amendment: A 2/3 majority of Congress passed the ERA in 1972 and a 3/4 majority of states have ratified it. Virginia became the final state in 2020 and the ERA became effective in 2022. But it has not yet been published by the U.S. Archivist.

Some contest the ERA's validity based on a disputed legal memo from the Trump Administration, which deterred the Archivist from publishing the ERA in 2020. Some also claim it is too late for the ERA to be finalized, based on an arbitrary deadline set by Congress in 1972. However, legal experts have explained that Congress can change the deadline, as it has done once before, or disregard it.

In 2023, Congress introduced two resolutions to clarify that the ERA is the valid 28th Amendment. Although they are not legally necessary, they will underscore democratic support for the ERA and resolve confusion over the ERA's status.

#### *What is the #Faith4ERA campaign?*

The #Faith4ERA campaign is a national, interfaith initiative supported by diverse religious organizations and leaders calling for equality in the U.S. Constitution through the ERA.

Launched in 2021 by Justice Revival, the #Faith4ERA campaign is part of a broader movement for the ERA and is instrumental in mobilizing religious support for equal rights. We provide public education on the ERA through workshops, published articles, and online resources, and mobilize people of faith to advocate for the ERA.

*"Women possess every bit of the image of God that men possess. We are equally human and our work is equally valuable. It is time for the U.S. Constitution to agree with God. It is time to pass the ERA."*

Lisa Sharon Harper, Justice Revival Board Member, Founder & President of Freedom Road



*How can I help get the ERA across the finish line?*

- Ensure elected officials and candidates know you support the ERA and urge them to lead on this issue. Find advocacy opportunities here: [bit.ly/Faith4ERAadvocacy](https://bit.ly/Faith4ERAadvocacy)
- Encourage your faith leaders to sign and share the Interfaith Statement of Support for the ERA: [bit.ly/Faith4ERASTatement](https://bit.ly/Faith4ERASTatement)
- Invite Justice Revival to preach a sermon, host a workshop, or speak at an event to educate your community about the ERA and gender justice: [bit.ly/JREducation](https://bit.ly/JREducation)
- Host a book club on the ERA in your community. We recommend:
  - Ordinary Equality: The Fearless Women and Queer People Who Shaped the U.S. Constitution and the ERA by Kate Kelly
  - We the Women: The Unstoppable Mothers of the ERA by Julie C. Suk
- Sign up for email updates from Justice Revival to stay in the loop about the latest ERA news and advocacy opportunities: [bit.ly/JRUpdates](https://bit.ly/JRUpdates)
- Visit our ERA FAQ page to learn more: [bit.ly/Faith4ERAFAQs](https://bit.ly/Faith4ERAFAQs)
- Follow the ERA Coalition for additional updates: [eracoalition.org](https://eracoalition.org)

Justice Revival is a leading Christian voice for human rights in the United States and home to the #Faith4ERA campaign. As a diverse, inclusive community, Justice Revival inspires, educates, and mobilizes people of faith to respond to the call to justice by defending the human rights of all.

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**FLTN's November 2023 Meeting in San Antonio:** When the war in Gaza/Israel had just broken out, we asked where we are located, with whom we are allied. We focused on how we see the situation in all of its complexity especially with regard to women, children, and female identified persons. In light of that, we asked how we can imagine feminist liberation

theologians might be useful, what tools and insights from feminisms, liberationist work, and theologies might be unique and relevant resources for developing meaningful conversations especially with people who see things differently.

It was a fruitful discussion, as inconclusive as it was informative. Unlike some of our colleagues at the AAR/SBL who were unable to continue conversations at that 2023 gathering, we were more equipped to keep the conversation going with those with whom we disagreed.

Feminism and nonviolence is a salient theme as the wars both in Gaza/Israel and in Russia/Ukraine grind on. Mary Yelenick is a retired attorney from NYC where she was a litigator in a global law firm. She is now the Main Representative for Pax Christi International at the United Nations.

She describes her work as “to share with policymakers the knowledge and global resources of PCI, explaining to them lessons learned and relayed by our many members around the globe, and to familiarize and share with UN member nations and staff (as well as with other NGOs) the demonstrable power and efficacy of nonviolence.”

<https://www.catholicprofiles.org/post/an-interview-with-mary-t-yelenick>.

While we may not all agree on nonviolence, it is a helpful way into deeper conversation many months and many thousands deaths and injuries later.

### **3. NONVIOLENCE: THE ONLY WAY TO A LASTING PEACE**

**Mary T. Yelenick**

We are living in an era of what feels like constant war plaguing much of our global community.

It is a time of global reckoning – of seeking redress for decades-long unfairness and inequalities; of wreaking vengeance for historic wrongs; of resurrecting unfinished disputes.

It is a time when the bankruptcy of global violence; the tragic legacy of prior wars; and expiation for unaddressed wrongs is front and center.

And yet nations, and communities, are responding to these challenges with the same tools of violence that created these crises to begin with.



But – as we see, time and time again – violence does not, and will not end violence. It simply perpetuates and ensures the continuation of violence – if not in the short term, then in the long term.

The only way to interrupt and put an end to the madness and circularity of war – the only way to highjack violence – is through active, creative Nonviolence.

“Nonviolence” – as I am using the word here – has no hyphen. It is not a concept or construct simply derivative of violence.

Nonviolence has its own logic, its own rules, its own history.

Nonviolence is not only a strategic practice. Rather, Nonviolence is a way of living: of engaging with, interacting with, and responding to others.

And it is the only force that has been shown – time and time again, across generations, in regions all around the world – to be capable of repairing and restoring right relationships between not only people, but between people and planet. It is the only way of stopping – not just pausing – the cycle of violence that ensures that every generation’s wars will also hold subsequent generations hostage.

Nonviolence is not passivity. It is not avoidance.

It is action – action that is very purposeful, and very targeted. It is taking action thoughtfully, deliberately, creatively – mindful of the impact of that action on the recipient, and on the actor, and on the onlooker.

Nonviolence requires great discipline: far more discipline than simply lashing out, or sending in troops and dropping bombs.

It requires strategic thinking. It is playing chess, recognizing that the game will be long. It is not simply closing up the board and walking away.

Nonviolence requires courage, commitment, and steadfastness.

Nonviolence advances justice, fairness, and right relationships – without doing harm in the process. It is the only force that can break a cycle of violence.

Violence – its supposed necessity, its claimed efficacy, its purported universality – is the basis on which we in the United States have been taught to respond to others. Our settler-colonial history – and much of our domestic and foreign policy – is grounded in, sought to be justified by – and still perpetuated by – that violence. Even our public monuments extol violence.

The largest industries in the so-called “defense” sector – which profit obscenely by inculcating the belief that their weapons somehow make us safer, in a sinister world – exert inordinate influence, through their campaign contributions, on those who formulate our domestic and foreign policies. The sums that the U.S. spends annually on weapons are staggering – eclipsing the spending of the next nine-largest-weapons-spending nations combined.

And for what? Those weapons have brought nothing but misery to already-suffering people around the world. And they have generated deep anger in much of the world against the United States – anger that will be felt by, and visited upon, our children (if the world somehow avoids nuclear-weapons annihilation before then).

We all know, all too well, what triggers violence: Feeling threatened. Feeling oneself to be in physical danger. Feeling ignored, minimized, or underestimated. Feeling publicly humiliated. Feeling unfairly treated. Jealousy. Spite. Retribution.

Yet none of these feelings or reactions will be vanquished by violence.

To the contrary, violence only exacerbates and escalates those feelings.

Witness how the national humiliations resulting from World War One gave rise to Hitler, and World War Two; and how the unaddressed wrongs, rivalries, and exclusionary alliances emerging from World War Two are made manifest today in global wars.

When you are the victim of an act of violence, you feel justified in responding in kind.

And each such violent response, in turn, serves as justification for a violent counter-response. There is no end to it.

It is an endless death spiral.

Fortunately, there are many in the world who have embarked on the journey of Nonviolence.

Spiritual and secular leaders – Mahatma Gandhi, Cory Aquino, Bayard Rustin, Nelson Mandela, Claudette Colvin, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, John Lewis, the Freedom Riders, and many others globally – have recognized that reciprocating violence with violence only guarantees reprisal – with the perpetrators feeling entitled to act in that manner, given the provocation.

Other historic and contemporary examples of effective global Nonviolence abound. I would strongly recommend – if you really want to be humbled by the power of Nonviolence – going online, and taking a look at the work being done by the group Parents Circle Family Forum, comprising Israelis and Palestinians who have experienced the murders of their children, yet who are committed to working together actively and peacefully to put an end to the cycle of violence. Or consider the Amish, whose remarkable forgiveness of the murderers of their community members set the greater community on a higher track. Or consider the women of Liberia, whose active, sustained, disciplined, peaceful vigiling ended the cycle of horrific violence in their country.

It is women who disproportionately bear the cost of violence. Women experience firsthand the horrific effects of violence on their families, their neighbors, their elders, their own bodies – and on their futures.

It is no accident that globally, women have been at the forefront of nonviolent struggle, and nonviolent resolution of disputes.

For all the women in the world, and for their families; for future generations; and for our beloved planet, let us each commit to studying, advocating for, and practicing creative Nonviolence.

It is the only way that we can, or will, survive.

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**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS** ensured about how our various forms of feminist liberation theological work overlap with the issues raised by the speakers.

**PLENARY DISCUSSION** followed. Here is a small snippet of the conversation:

1. A colleague who works with immigrants (in Ireland) queried about how to operationalize nonviolence when working with people from a variety of religious traditions (for example, Muslim, Christian, Jewish) whose assumptions may differ widely, for example on matters of land.

2. A politically involved colleague spoke of how few people are involved with *party* politics (3% in her case in Canada). She affirmed connecting spiritual values with concrete action.

3. A professor (Brazilian by birth, now teaching in the U.S.) told of frustration with liberation theologies and decolonializing theory. She searches for more practical ideas and found that nonviolence in a Buddhist context was helpful for her students.

4. Another colleague wondered about the ‘tool kits’, levers of power we have given our levels of privilege. For example, Don’t Bank on the Bomb <https://www.dontbankonthebomb.com/>, looks at companies that profit from arms sales. There are connections between those and common pension funds in the webs of support for war.

5. A longtime colleague asked about resources on economics, the values base of feminism and nonviolence, and other issues we have discussed. These notes are a step in that direction. **Bibliography** is welcome and will be passed on through the FLTN Google list. One suggestion made at this meeting is *Homelands: A Personal History of Europe*, Timothy Garton Ash, 2023. Another is *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*, Danya Ruttenberg, 2022; *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native People (Multicultural Foundations of Psychology and Counseling Series)*, Eduardo Duran, 2006. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. Tyson Yunkaporta, 2021.

6. There were several people who work at the UN, no doubt interested in the work of Mary Yelenick. One suggested their getting together. If you let us know who you are, we will be happy to put you in touch. A resource worth considering is the organization Nonviolent Peaceforce, <https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/> .

7. A Canadian colleague regretted the loss of peace movements in various countries. Where does one find such now? Groups like FLTN are at least one place to look and get support.

8. A UN worker spoke of the power of Australian youth working on rights with indigenous people.

**Suggestions for future topics:**

- Solidarity
- Active non-violence as a way of life; an expression of integrity and creativity, a complicated way of working; saying no to war and militarism
- Refugees
- Influence of religious leader on political actors across national contexts (e.g. Australia and US)
- Cross fertilization of communities of resistance
- Enduring under autocracy
- Religion and War
- Women as leaders in peace
- A feminist theology of forgiveness
- Promoting indigenous women's theology
- Conversations across differences -listening and speaking non-violently

Feel free to send other suggestions for future agenda.

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Thank you to our speakers, Michelle, Allyson, and Mary, and to Lisa Lauterbach for technical support. Thanks to all who participated. It is amazing to think how many people we all touch in our work.

Feel free to use the Google list to share information with one another (for information on how to join the list write to [waterstaff@hers.com](mailto:waterstaff@hers.com)). Consult our website [www.waterwomensalliance.org](http://www.waterwomensalliance.org) for other WATER programs.

**The next meeting of the FLTN will be in San Diego, CA on Friday, November 22, 2024 from 4-6 PM in conjunction with the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Watch also for Women’s Caucus sessions in the AAR/SBL Program. All are welcome.**