



Report from the UU Women's Federation: GA 2012

... advancing justice for women and promoting their spiritual development

As we at the UU Women's Federation looked at this GA's focus on immigration, racial, and economic justice, we immediately saw what a good fit it is for us. Since the UUWF's mission statement begins with the words "advancing justice for women and girls," we are already positioned to address those issues as they relate to women and girls. We have been vigorously engaged in this work for nearly 50 years.

And while the human rights of immigrants and the racial targeting of persons of color were most prominent in our hearts and minds when this Justice General Assembly was conceived – in reaction to the draconian and damaging immigration legislation adopted here in Arizona – we can now unfortunately add the status of women and gender targeting of women to our priorities. On Capitol Hill and in state legislatures, the attacks on women's rights have been unremitting recently, with stunningly mean-spirited and/or cynical roll-backs in the areas of reproductive justice, access to health care, equal pay, and measures to stop domestic violence.

We at the UU Women's Federation are outraged, and we are working on several fronts to support Unitarian Universalists as they work to counter the omnipresent threats to the welfare of women and girls. In recent months we have signed onto a letter protesting the [Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act](#) and, at our April board meeting, voted to [reaffirm our commitment](#) to the UUA's resolutions on reproductive rights. We go back before *Roe v Wade* on this issue and are founding and continuing members of the [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice](#).

We are also heartened by the UUA's renewed focus on women's issues. Late last year we worked closely with the Association's Multicultural and Witness staffing group to help revision the [UUWF Clara Barton Internship for Women's Issues](#), a position supported by an endowment comprising funds the UUWF donated and helped raise in the first years of this 21st century. That process has placed the internship in just the right spot to support UUs at the grassroots, since it has moved the position's emphasis from direct advocacy at the federal level to providing resources and opportunities for congregations and their leaders to advocate for justice issues specific to women, notably reproductive and economic justice.

Jessica Halperin filled the redefined position in January, and the UUWF board and I have been working closely with her to support her efforts with UUWF's resources. In addition to giving her space in our newsletter, we have also arranged for her to post action alerts and other information on our [Facebook page](#), website and list serv. We are also working to connect her with the appropriate women in UUWF-affiliated women's groups in our local congregations.

When it came to focusing our GA programming on its specific theme we were also able to find a good fit. Later this morning Jessica will join Rev. Helen Zidowecki and me in presenting a workshop on engaging women in justice work through small group ministry. This form of ministry is increasingly popular among our local congregations, and as Rev. Zidowecki has written:

Small Group Ministry provides the intimacy that allows going deeper personally as we address issues of critical concern, and engages women and girls who might not otherwise be involved in social action issues of concern to women. The ultimacy of Small Group Ministry involves more people of all ages and genders in addressing issues of concern to women on a more an intentional and meaningful level.

Our other event, on Saturday, features Dr. Cecilia Rosales, Director of Phoenix Programs for the University of Arizona's Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health. Dr. Rosales will speak about her work on reproductive justice and compassion issues among vulnerable populations of women and girls on the U.S.-Mexico. This event begins at 3 pm in the Hyatt Hotel – if you would like to attend this event you can still make a reservation by emailing espencer@uua.org or, onsite in Phoenix, at the UUWF booth in the display area.

In preparing for this GA we also looked at two of our grants programs. In addition to selecting grant recipients who come to us from a general call for proposals, the parameters of both programs allow the UUWF to select recipients more intentionally by commissioning specific projects. For 2012, we opted to select for funding one project for each program that specifically addressed immigration, racial or economic justice issues as they affect women and.

Our [Equity and Justice Grants Program](#) supports UU justice projects directly affecting women and girls, and I am pleased to announce that we are giving a \$5,000 grant to the [UU Congregation of Green Valley, AZ](#), for “Amigas de Amado,” a project to assist marginalized Hispanic women and girls in the congregation's home community of Amado, AZ.

The project will be carried out by women from the congregation and will involve working in partnerships with existing agencies – a youth alliance, an adult education program, and a local elementary school – to increase their capacity for serving women and girls and in the process identifying some of the underlying systemic issues.

We next looked at our [Margaret Fuller Grants Program](#), which supports projects that explore feminist thought and action within a religious or spiritual context. Our intention here was to commission a project that deepens our understanding and appreciation of woman-centered centered religious beliefs or spiritual practices of immigrant and/or indigenous cultures.

Little did we know that our search for this project would lead us to the Panama Canal – which many of us were taught as children to view as a triumph of American progress over nature. Sofia Betancourt, recipient of our \$4,000 Margaret Fuller Grant, has seen instead how creation of the canal involved egregious violations of both the first and seventh of our UU principles. For over 30 years thousands of laborers were recruited from outside Panama to work on the canal, their inherent worth and dignity under constant assault from a variety of abuses. And it is hard to imagine more disrespect for the interdependent web of all existence than is demonstrated by the canal's initial and continuing impact upon the natural environment.

The resilient spirit of the Caribbean women brought to Panama to work on the canal is the subject of Ms. Betancourt's project, which will explore ecowomanist ethics drawn from their experiences. This is work that can be characterized not only as womanist, but also as mjuerista and ecofeminist. It also represents a "first," as to date there is not a single complete monograph on ecowomanist thought.

These commissioned grant projects are not only worthy in themselves, they place UUWF, as always, in solid partnership with the vision and priorities of our entire progressive faith movement. We are confident that they will be models of the scope and depth of work on behalf of equity and justice we would hope to support and promote as we move proudly toward our 50th anniversary celebration in 2013.

Sincerely,



Rev. Marti Keller
President