

Congregational Resource Packet on Reproductive Justice

Ten Things Your Congregation Can Do

Ideas of various levels of commitment to help raise the profile of reproductive justice issues through legislative advocacy, education, and social witness

Liturgical Calendar

Three to four events in each season of the year, through which to celebrate and remember the reproductive justice movement and its champions

Faith Development Guide

Suggestions for activities and discussions for Unitarian Universalists of all ages, according to the learners' developmental capacity and stage of faith development

Small Group Ministry Session Plans

What is Reproductive Justice?
Reproductive Justice: Choice and Loss
Reproductive Justice: Raising Children

Sample Worship

Includes other relevant hymns and a suggested Children's Activity

Clergy Packet

Collegial Letter to Unitarian Universalist Ministers
Resources for Pastoral Care
Sermon Archive
Resources for Sermons and Worship
Unitarian Universalist Theology of Reproductive Justice

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Unitarian Universalist Association
in partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

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Dear Friends,

Thank you for your interest in reproductive justice!

Of the controversial and complex issues that the U.S. public and its politicians wrestle with daily, the conversation about reproductive justice is one on which Unitarian Universalists present a uniquely united front. For fifty years, the UUA and its member congregations have been working, speaking, and witnessing for reproductive rights and justice. The first religious tradition to issue a statement in support of the dignity and decisions of women (1961), a founding member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (1973), and a vital player in the historic Supreme Court decision, *Roe vs. Wade* (1971), Unitarian Universalists have always been at the leading edge of the movement to recognize the religious and political necessity of a fully-autonomous reproductive and sexual life.

As advocates using the framework of 'reproductive justice,' Unitarian Universalists again find ourselves on the leading edge of this conversation. Broader than the campaign for 'reproductive health' – which advocates to close the gap in the provision of services to individuals – and deeper than the issues related to 'reproductive rights' – which are won on the legal and legislative battlegrounds against government intrusion into women's bodies – reproductive justice is grounded in the systemic oppressions that impact a person's desire, abilities, and resources to have children or not. Began officially in 1994 by coalitions of women of color, the reproductive justice movement is an intersectional approach to the ending of reproductive oppression, in which the government must play an active part.

The anti-oppressive, relationship-based components of reproductive justice make it a perfect fit for the present and future of Unitarian Universalist advocacy on these issues. The dedication of the Unitarian Universalist Association to becoming an anti-racist, multicultural organization is transforming us and improving our justice work. As a faith-based, reproductive justice organization, we fill a unique niche in the movement and provide a vital voice in the public sphere.

I hope that this Congregational Resource Packet can help you and your congregation provide that vital voice to the public sphere. Here you will find resources that can help you plan worships, build relationships and organize communities, develop more intimate and spiritual relationships with each other, gather in multigenerational conversations, and, of course, change the world. The Resource Packet is aimed for adult or young adult leaders (or aspiring leaders) in a congregation, and can be used either in separate pieces or as a total program. It is available on the UUA's reproductive justice webpages (uua.org/reproductivejustice). Like all of our work for justice, this Resource Packet is a work in progress. If you have suggestions, questions, or challenges in using this packet, please let us know so we can continue to update and improve it. Email womensissues@uua.org or call the UUA's Witness Ministries office at (202) 393-2255.

Again, thanks for your interest in reproductive justice. Blessings on your journey.

See you out there!

Jessica Halperin
Women's Issues Program Associate/UUWF Clara Barton Intern

10 Things Your Congregation Can Do For Reproductive Justice

Many of these ideas, indeed the movement of reproductive justice itself, are about building relationships across social divisions and advocacy issues to witness for wholeness in all aspects of our reproductive lives. [Learn more](#) about building partnerships with affected groups in your community.

Organizing tips, news briefs, and action alerts are available at your fingertips every week or two with the UUA's **Women's Issues Alerts**. [Sign up today](#). Also, many valuable materials can be found on the UUA's [Resource Page](#) for congregations taking action on social justice.

1. **Teach more OWL.**

Many UU and UCC congregations are already teaching OWL to their middle school youth groups. [OWL curricula](#) are available for many other generations of people, including kindergarten, young adult, and adult. Offer to teach it at a local shelter or community center – diverse partnerships are what reproductive justice is all about!

2. **Host a guest speaker.**

A great way to start relationships with other organizations working for reproductive justice is to co-host an event with them, or welcome a representative as a guest speaker. Find out if your [regional Planned Parenthood affiliate](#) has offices in your area, or locate a [SisterSong](#) member organization near you. Pro-choice interfaith panels can be a wonderful way of building a local movement in your community.

3. **Share the plate.**

Many local health clinics, health centers, and other organizations are in danger of losing their federal funding (or have already lost it). Your congregation can help, especially by giving regularly. Ask a representative of the recipient organization to give the offering reflection, which is another great way of beginning a partnership.

4. **Sponsor a letter-writing campaign.**

The U.S. Congress and most state legislatures are currently debating some sort of law that endangers reproductive justice. Find out what's happening in your area, and ask your congregation or organization members to make their voices heard to their elected officials. It's as easy as setting up a booth at coffee hour, but can also be much larger than that. Contact [Jessica Halperin](#), UUA Women's Issues Program Associate, for help or talking points.

5. **Preach.**

Many UU ministers and congregations have led services on reproductive choice or justice. Besides teaching Unitarian Universalists about being allies and faithful partners in this movement, leading a congregation through the practice of reproductive justice-making can challenge us to be more inclusive, tender, and prophetic communities. Find

an archive of sermons, a list of theological and worship resources, and a sample worship service on the UUA's [reproductive justice webpages](#).

6. Hold a workshop or class on reproductive justice.

Reproductive justice is a more comprehensive and different framework from 'reproductive health' or 'reproductive rights.' Learning and teaching with your congregation about these different frameworks is the best way of engaging them in the critical work that Unitarian Universalists can do in this movement. There is enough material to span two hours or two months of conversations and is best when done in collaboration with local, affected partners. Contact Jessica Halperin, UUA Women's Issues Program Associate, for resources, and find lesson plans for Small Group Ministry sessions [online](#).

7. Start a reproductive justice group, and/or connect to other groups.

Reproductive justice groups are a great way of staying active on these issues and building leadership within your congregation. Many other congregations have reproductive justice groups also – learning from each other and exchanging resources and ideas makes the reproductive justice movement real and sustainable. Contact Jessica Halperin, UUA Women's Issues Program Associate, to get into the loop, listen to the [Congregational Best Practices webinar](#), and join the Facebook group, "[UUs for Reproductive Justice](#)."

8. Organize a rally or march.

Public shows of support for reproductive justice are great publicity your congregation's opinions on the topic, and also can demonstrate visible support in your community for issues of reproductive justice. Rallies and marches may have little impact when done without the participation of the most affected populations, but when done in partnership with partner groups most affected by reproductive oppression, public demonstrations can be very effective tools for justice-making. Don't forget your Standing on the Side of Love t-shirts, and share your pictures and stories with the UUA and local media!

9. Volunteer.

Build on relationships started by congregational donations or a co-hosted event by providing an in-person presence in your community. Women's health clinics are often in need of volunteers as clinic defenders or patient companions. A compassionate, pro-woman presence is an important way to make justice real for vulnerable people.

10. Give a Courageous Love Award to a leader in your community.

Raise the profile of a local activist and help inspire others to get involved by profiling someone "whose words and deeds exemplify the values of inclusion, diversity, community, and equality." Began by the Standing on the Side of Love (SSL) campaign, these awards can also be useful reasons to raise your local media profile – let journalists and bloggers know about the award. See the [SSL website](#) for award information and a media template.

Liturgical Calendar

Celebrate and remember the reproductive justice movement and its champions with these events in each season of the year. Have some to add? Email womensissues@uua.org with questions and comments.

Spring

- **March 23, 2010: Equity and Compassion in Human Relations**
The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is signed into law by President Barack Obama, providing the most significant policy response to race-, gender-, and class-based health care inequalities to-date. The ACA also significantly broadens access by U.S. citizens to prenatal and preventative care, including contraceptive services. [Find out more.](#)
- **May 12, 2008: Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty, and Justice for All**
Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided the Agriprocessors Inc plant in Postville, Iowa. The raid in Postville was the largest in United States history, placing more than 389 immigrant workers under arrest and more than ninety children into the foster care system. [Find out more](#), or screen the film, "[AbUSed: The Postville Raid.](#)"
- **May 31, 2009: The Right of Conscience**
While serving as an usher at the Sunday morning worship service at his church in Wichita, Kansas, Dr. George Tiller was shot through the eye and killed by anti-abortion activist Scott Roeder. Tiller was the medical director of a women's health clinic, which was one of just three locations in the United States where late-term abortions were available to women. His patients were almost always physically endangered by, or had extraordinary difficulty with, the pregnancy. [Find out more.](#)

Summer

- **June 4, 1919: Use of the Democratic Process in Society At Large**
Women were granted the right to vote by the US Senate, which approved the constitutional amendment by a vote of 56 to 25 after four hours of debate. The measure was passed in large part due to the efforts of Lucy Burns and Alice Paul, who's organizing of picket lines outside the White House resulted in their arrest, hunger striking, and forced-feeding until it was recognized by President Woodrow Wilson and members of Congress. [Find out more.](#)
- **June 11, 1880: Justice and Equity in Human Relations**
Jeanette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress, was born on this day near Missoula, Montana. In addition to being the first federally-elected official (1916), Rankin was also the only person to vote against US participation in both World War I and World War II and was one of the few suffragists ever to serve in Congress. [Find out more.](#)

- **June 28, 1969: Justice and Equity in Human Relations**

The Stonewall Riots occur in Greenwich Village in New York City, catapulting the battle for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people into the public eye. More than forty years later, many GLBT people still do not have equal rights of marriage or adoption, and unequal access to necessary health care services and pregnancy options. [Find out more.](#)

Fall

- **October 1, 1976: Right of Conscience and Use of the Democratic Process**

The Indian Health Care Improvement Act is signed into law, giving tribes the right to manage or control Indian Health Service programs, ending programs of forced sterilization. Various studies have revealed that, between the years of 1970 and 1976, the Indian Health Service sterilized between 25 and 50 percent of Native American women. [Find out more.](#)

- **October 16, 1916: Words and Deeds of Prophetic Women and Men**

Margaret Sanger and her sister, Ethel Byrne, opened the first U.S. birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York, offering counseling, birth control information, and supplies to local women. Nine days later, the police close the clinic and arrest Sanger, Burne, and their staff under charges of “maintaining a public nuisance.” Their arrest and subsequent conviction introduced the controversy to the public, generating both supporters and wider opposition. [Find out more.](#)

- **October 19-22, 1967: Search for Truth and Meaning**

The first of its kind in Unitarian Universalism, the annual Fall Conference of the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) focuses on sex and sexuality and provides members with resources for talking about these issues with parents and youth. In the context of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Unitarian Universalist religious educators around the country had been asked questions by youth and their parents that they did not know how to answer. The conference resulted, in part, with the idea for a faith-based curriculum that addressed real life issues emerging for UU young people, which evolved into “About Your Sexuality” (AYS), launched in 1970, and subsequently “Our Whole Lives” (OWL). Immediately controversial, AYS was subject to a court case on obscenity and also drew public fire from Lenore Romney, wife of a cabinet member of then-president Richard Nixon and mother of 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney. [Find out more.](#)

- **September 4-15, 1995: Interdependent Web of All Existence**

The United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women is held in Beijing, China. The conference established, on an international scale, that environmental justice is “necessary for the health and wellbeing of women.” Beyond food security and safe drinking water, the Beijing Declaration asked nations to provide universal health care, reporting on women’s health risks as related to the environment, projects to promote gender equality, and education and services on reproductive rights and

responsibilities. Find out more about the [conference in Beijing](#) and the intersections of [environmental justice and reproductive justice](#).

Winter

- **November 5, 1994: Acceptance of One Another and Encouragement to Growth**
The framework of "reproductive justice" was coined by the Black Women's Caucus at a national conference in Chicago. The National Association of Negro Women had begun criticizing the framework of "choice" in the 1970s, but the conference in Chicago was specifically inspired by the Cairo Programme of Action that was created two months earlier at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and, with the framework of "reproductive justice", aimed to move away from "rights"-based language to integrate ideas of reproductive health with social justice. [Find out more.](#)
- **January 23, 1973: Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person**
In their watershed decision, *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion in the United States. Having ruled in previous cases, *Griswold v. Connecticut* and *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, that married couples and single people have a federally-protected right to privacy, the court ruled that a woman's right to privacy is "broad enough to encompass her decision whether or not to terminate a pregnancy." Previous laws against the procedure, established for the safety of women, had been made irrelevant by medical developments. [Find out more.](#)

Faith Development Guide

Based on James Fowler's "[Stages of Faith](#)," the following are suggestions for activities and discussions on reproductive justice, according to the learners' developmental capacity and stage of faith development.

Please help develop this resource! If you have helped children talk about reproductive justice, please let us know what you did and how it went. Email womensissues@uua.org.

People of every age are encouraged to take an [OWL course](#) or attend a relevant rally/demonstration as a way of learning about, and working for reproductive justice.

Ages 3-7 Years

Hearing, and acting out stories; drawing; wondering about:

- **Justice:** What they need to live and be happy; what every child should have. Everyone should have the same opportunities to make their own choices and be happy.
- **Conscience:** What is the right/true thing; doing and seeing others do the right thing; voting
- **Reverence for life:** Everyone and everything is important and should be treated fairly and with respect.

Ages 8-12 Years

Writing and/or acting stories; journaling with visual/verbal reflection about:

- **Friendship and morality:** We face conflicts in caring for the people we love, or in how and why we spend our time and attention. We make choices that reveal our characters, and we are capable of knowing and doing the right thing.
- **Different types families; prejudice and stereotypes:** All people need to be loved and cared for, and any home that does that for the people that live there is a good, important one that should have equal rights and opportunities.
- **Law-making; voting; conscience:** Where have you seen the democratic process in action, and how do you feel about the eventual decision that was made? Every person has the right to do what they believe is true and right as long as it doesn't hurt another person.
- **Creation myths and stories from various world religions:** The worlds religions have varying things to say about the origin, purpose, and value of life, but Unitarian Universalists believe that all life is sacred and interdependent.
- **Justice:** What do I wish for, for myself, for my community, and for our world? When have I seen justice happening in the world? When was injustice happening?
- **Healthcare:** How do I stay healthy? Why do I go to the doctor's office, and who pays for my medical care? What would happen if my family doesn't have insurance?
- **Pregnancy and babies:** How do people get pregnant? What choices did they make? How do they prepare for a baby?

Ages 13-17 Years

Individual/group reflections, activities about:

- **Planned and unplanned pregnancies:** What are the options available? To whom could you turn for help? What medical, emotional, and spiritual resources would you like to have, or do you have? Do other people have access to these resources, too? Why do people decide to have children, and how do they prepare? What do Unitarian Universalists do to honor new life?
- **Conscience and moral dilemmas:** Where does our conscience come from? How do we know 'right' from 'wrong'? What do others think, what do I think? What is a "free and responsible" search for truth and meaning?
- **Privilege, discrimination, and anti-oppression:** How does systemic oppression work? What is privilege, and how is my life impacted? What is discrimination, and how is my life impacted?
- **Lawmaking and legislative advocacy:** How are laws made, and why is that important to my life? What impact can I have on law-makers, and why is that important? How does democracy work?
- **The Seven Principles and social justice:** What is happening in the news? How do each of the seven principles call Unitarian Universalists to respond to social/environmental/political injustice?
- **Health care and economic justice:** How do I stay healthy? What would happen if my family doesn't have insurance? What would happen to my family if we lost our regular income(s)? How does the minimum wage and the gender wage gap impact families (systemically and individually)?

Ages 19-35 Years; Adults

[Small group ministry sessions](#) on reproductive justice topics including raising children, choice and loss, and voting.

Congregational/Unitarian Universalist leadership:

- Facilitate/attend anti-racism trainings.
- [Safe Congregations](#): Take pro-active steps to create environments in your congregation that are sexually safe.
- [Teach OWL](#): *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) provides facts about anatomy and human development, and also helps participants clarify their values, build interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality.

Advocacy:

- [10 Things Your Congregation Can Do for Reproductive Justice](#)
- Familiarize yourself with, and participate in UUA's process of writing social justice statements, which is the foundation for denomination-wide public witness priorities. [Get more information](#).
- [The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health, and Justice](#)
- For further reading:
 - o Marvin Ellison, *Erotic Justice*
 - o Debra Haffner, UUA: [Balancing Acts](#)
 - o [Study Guides](#) from The Religious Institute

Small Group Ministry Session Plan #1
What Is Reproductive Justice?

Opening Words:

To Be Of Use

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

- Marge Piercy

Check-in

Focus/Topic: *What Is Reproductive Justice?*

As members of a religious tradition with a long and substantive history working for reproductive rights and a firm commitment to anti-racism, multiculturalism, and social justice, Unitarian Universalists are called to widen the current socio-political debate on “reproductive rights” to one on “reproductive justice.”

Within the framework of reproductive justice, the Unitarian Universalist Association works against the cultural, political, economic, and structural constraints that limit women's access to health care and full reproductive choice. Reproductive justice, a concept put forth by coalitions of women of color, promotes the right of all women to have children, not to have children, and to raise their children in safe and healthy environments. It does not isolate or pit important social issues against each other, rather it works to promote these rights across many areas, including comprehensive sex education, economic justice, ending violence against women, LGBTQ equality, and racial justice.

1. Why, as a faith community, do Unitarian Universalists work to promote reproductive rights and reproductive justice?
2. How has your life been impacted by the movements of reproductive rights and reproductive justice?
3. For many successful and productive years, Unitarian Universalists worked for reproductive rights. Since the mid-1990s, however, the framework of reproductive justice has been useful, particularly by groups of women of color, to frame a larger movement against reproductive oppression. How has your reproductive life been impacted by, or might yet be impacted by, your race, sexuality orientation, gender identity, and socio-economic background?

Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

Earth mother, star mother,
You who are called by
a thousand names,
May all remember
we are cells in your body
and dance together.
You are the grain and the loaf
that sustains us each day,
And as you are patient
with our struggles to learn
So shall we be patient
with ourselves and each other.
We are radiant light
and sacred dark – the balance –
You are the embrace that heartens
And the freedom beyond fear.
Within you we are born,
we grow, live, and die –
You bring us around the circle to rebirth
Within us you dance
Forever.

- Starhawk

Small Group Ministry Session Plan #2
Reproductive Justice: Choice and Loss

Opening Words:

Conscience is the name given the governing principles of life to which a person is ultimately committed. The totality of the self and thus the integrity of personhood is involved in the moral dictates of conscience. This is the primary arena of the spirit's struggle with the moral claims made by the will of God. The depths of one's own being and the ground of meaning of one's own existence are expressed in the struggles of conscience.

- Paul D. Simmons; *Personhood, the Bible, and the Abortion Debate*

Check-in

Focus/Topic: *Reproductive Justice: Choice and Loss*

As members of a religious tradition with a long and substantive history working for reproductive rights and a firm commitment to anti-racism, multiculturalism, and social justice, Unitarian Universalists are called to widen the current socio-political debate on "reproductive rights" to one on "reproductive justice."

Within the framework of reproductive justice, the Unitarian Universalist Association works against the cultural, political, economic, and structural constraints that limit women's access to health care and full reproductive choice. Reproductive justice, a concept put forth by coalitions of women of color, promotes the right of all women to have children, not to have children, and to raise their children in safe and healthy environments. It does not isolate or pit important social issues against each other, rather it works to promote these rights across many areas, including comprehensive sex education, economic justice, ending violence against women, LGBTQ equality, and racial justice.

1. Unitarian Universalists affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Please share experiences you have had in which your autonomy over your reproductive and sexual life (or lack thereof) impacted your sense of your own 'inherent worth and dignity'?
2. Tell us about an important moment in your reproductive life. What made it important, and how does that moment relate to your faith and the rest of your life?
3. The bodily autonomy of pregnant (and potentially pregnant) people is being threatened in legislatures across the United States and in Washington D.C. What role do faith communities have in the current debates?

Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:The Larger Circle

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other's arms
And the larger circle of lovers,
Whose hands are joined in a dance
And the larger circle of all creatures
Passing in and out of life
Who move also in a dance
To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it
Except in fragments.

- Wendell Berry

Small Group Ministry Session Plan #3
Reproductive Justice: Raising Children

Opening Words:

That Paseth All Understanding

An awe so quiet
I don't know when it began.

A gratitude
had begun
to sing in me.

Was there
some moment
dividing
song from no song?

When does dewfall begin?

When does night
fold its arms over our hearts
to cherish them?

When is daybreak?

- Denise Levertov, *Oblique Prayers*

Check-in

Focus/Topic: *Reproductive Justice: Raising Children*

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isolate or pit important social issues against each other, rather it works to promote these rights across many areas, including comprehensive sex education, economic justice, ending violence against women, LGBTQ equality, and racial justice.

1. From your experience, describe the social, political, economic, and spiritual conditions in which you raised/would like to raise/believe are important to raising healthy children.
2. How does/can the religious community and government create and sustain those healthy conditions?
3. How can we support a woman when the desired conditions are not in place? How can we support her sense of worth and dignity when things are less than ideal?

Likes & Wishes

Closing Words:

Seek for the spirit of life that is within you;
that you might know more fully its power and strength.
Seek for the spirit of life that surrounds you;
that you might know more fully its connection to you.
Seek for the spirit of life that is within others;
that you might enter more fully into the community
that embraces us, this day and every day.

- Elizabeth M. Strong

Sample Worship – Reproductive Justice and Conscience

Conscience is the name given the governing principles of life to which a person is ultimately committed. The totality of the self and thus the integrity of personhood is involved in the moral dictates of conscience. This is the primary arena of the spirit's struggle with the moral claims made by the will of God. The depths of one's own being and the ground of meaning of one's own existence are expressed in the struggles of conscience.

- Paul D. Simmons; Personhood, the Bible, and the Abortion Debate

Prelude

Welcome

(Give an introduction to the congregation and the service, introduce yourself and [why this topic matters to Unitarian Universalists](#).)

Chalice Lighting

May the light we now kindle
inspire us to use our powers
to heal and not to harm,
to help and not to hinder,
to bless and not to curse,
to serve you, Spirit of Freedom.

Passover Haggadah

Hymn: Come Sing a Song with Me

Singing the Living Tradition #346

Time for All Ages: Making Choices and Casting Votes

(Gather the children at the front of the room. Read a story about voting or making choices, or ask them following questions:)

- Every day, many times a day, people have to make choices about what to do. Sometimes we have to think about what the 'right' thing to do is, and what the 'wrong' thing to do is, like when we help out a friend who needs us, or when we share our toys. When do you remember seeing someone who did something right or something wrong?
- How did you know that those actions were right or wrong?
- Is it possible that something right for one person might be wrong for another person?
- When your parents and other adults vote in elections, to choose members of the government of (city), (state), or the United States, they are often making choices between what they think is right and wrong. Have any of you been to a voting booth with your parents?
- What happened in the election? The candidate with the most votes won, right? Someone lost and someone won, and it's because some people with different ideas about right and wrong got to vote. Each person is important, and each person has a right to have their ideas matter. That's how our government works, and that's how our church works, too.

Responsive Reading: *To Be of Use* Marge Piercy
Singing the Living Tradition #567

Prayer: *Prayer for Elected Officials* Jessica Halperin
(See below)

Quiet Meditation

Reading: *(Excerpts from) Interfaith Statement Opposing Restrictions on Women's Health Care Options*

Religious Advocates Working Group

(This statement can be found online. For other suggestions of books or readings to excerpt from, check out these other [sermon resources](#).)

Sermon

(View an archive of reproductive justice sermons and links to sermon resources [here](#).)

Music for Reflection

Offering

(Donate all or half of the offering to a local domestic violence shelter, women's health clinic, or reproductive justice advocacy organization. Give a description of the organization in the Order of Service and ask a representative of the organization to attend the service and offer some words at this point in the service.)

Hymn: *We Would Be One* Singing the Living Tradition #318

Closing: *The Larger Circle* Wendell Berry
(Singing the Living Tradition #646)

Postlude

Other relevant hymns:

116 I'm On My Way

121 We'll Build a Land

298 Wake Now My Senses

1018 Come and Go With Me (in [Singing the Journey](#))

1026 If Every Woman (in [Singing the Journey](#))

1053 How Could Anyone (in [Singing the Journey](#))

Prayer for Our Elected Officials

Jessica Halperin

Spirit of Love and Justice,

Be with us today, and always. We take to the streets, we write letters, we sing and worship and gather in community – remind us that our gatherings are sacred because you are there.

Spirit of Love and Justice,

Be with our elected officials, today and always. In the difficult work they are called to do, in the choices they must make and the lives that they change – remind them that the work they do is sacred, filled with opportunities to bring more love and justice into the world.

Spirit of Love and Justice,

We know that life is complicated, and that no choice is easy and without repercussions. We know that the complexities of this world is what brings us together as people in sacred community, so that we may better know and remember the love and justice that guide our footsteps. We are grateful for the choices we can make, for the freedom, and dignity, and life-giving power that we claim when each of us makes a choice that is right for us.

Sometimes you whisper in our ears, Spirit, and sometimes we hear the roar of your presence in the voices of people raised in witness. You make yourself available to every one of us; black and white, Democrat and Republican, young and old, and we gather in prayer today to ask you to be with us, and with every one we meet.

May every one of us, and every one of our Elected Officials, hear and heed your cries – Spirit of Love and Justice. May we be grateful for the complicated choices that each of us have to make, and recognize that those choices are not only opportunities to bring more love and more justice into our world, but that those choices are the products of justice in our world – that discernment and conscience are sacred rights bestowed to each of us.

May we and our Elected Officials live fully into these gifts of choice and sacred discernment, and may they always be used to sustain more love and more justice. Amen.

Collegial Letter to Unitarian Universalist Ministers

Dear Ministerial Colleagues,

"Where did the churches go? We had so much support back in the 60's and 70's but not so much anymore. What ever happened to the churches...?"

Back in 2009, I attended the National Abortion Federations annual conference. I found myself chatting with Robin "Rocket Woman" Rothrock. When I introduced myself as a clergy-person-in-training, she smiled and said "Oh wonderful!" And then, she asked me, "Where did the churches go...?"

In the 1970's, Robin founded Hope Medical Group in Shreveport, LA in order to serve a large area of the South spanning Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas where there was no abortion provider. On opening day of Hope Medical Group, she was met with **1000 protesters and six patients**.

"You know, I consider what I do a ministry," said Robin. "So do I," I replied.

Unitarian Universalists have a long history supporting women's rights. Susan B. Anthony attended my grandparents' church in Rochester, NY. Roe vs. Wade was forged in the basement of First Unitarian Dallas. However, in recent years, in midst of polarization and controversy, we have drifted away from making these issues a priority. The last time General Assembly considered a major statement in this arena was in 1993, nearly 20 years ago!

Thanks to courageous activists, led by women of color, we know that women and families need so much more than choice and abortion: **women need reproductive justice**. Reproductive justice calls on us to focus on the right to have children, the right not to have children, the right to parent children in safe and healthy communities, and the right to live fully into their sexuality. The reproductive justice movement embraces the wide range of experiences women have with their bodies, pregnancy, childbearing, and parenting. It takes much more than laws to create a just and compassionate world—it requires us to move beyond the safety of privacy, to share our stories and our struggles in order to understand and provide the kind of support so many of us need.

Have you ever preached and included a story about a woman struggling with an unplanned pregnancy, struggling with feelings of doubt and grief? Afterwards men and women approach you after the service with tears in their eyes and a quiet 'thank you.'

Have you ever led a liturgy where women shared the stories of their reproductive lives? Stories of births, abortions, stillborns, adoptions, fetal anomalies, infertility, genetic

Congregational Resource Packet: Resources for Clergy

disorders, and miscarriages? Over 33% women will have at least one abortion in their lifetimes; around 15% of women who know they are pregnant will have a miscarriage; between 15-20% of heterosexual couples will experience infertility. Women and men carry these stories tucked deeply inside, afraid to encounter the increasing amounts of stigma; afraid that their personal experience will be turned into a political debate. **People within and outside our congregations are craving sanctuaries where the full complexity of their reproductive lives is acknowledged, embraced, and supported.**

Outside our congregations, **many prochoice and reproductive justice activists hunger for religiously grounded leaders to offer unequivocal moral and religious support for women, children, and families.** Offering spiritual grounding and an alternative moral authority, we as faith leaders also bring to the reproductive justice movement our religious convictions that support the decision-makers who care for many kinds of families.

Issues of reproductive justice are indeed very politically charged and controversial. They tap into our deepest held beliefs about humanity, life, death, and family. **And this is why we Unitarian Universalist leaders are called to lead the religious left in supporting reproductive justice.** Some of our Unitarian Universalist colleagues are already leading the national fight for reproductive justice; I join with Rev. Rob Keithan, the Public Policy Director for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Rev. Debra Haffner, Co-Founder and President of the Religious Institute, and others in urging you to make reproductive justice a priority in your congregation. Choose to offer prophetic and pastoral religious leadership and commit to reproductive justice. Honor the heroic legacies of our ancestors and elders, elders like Robin Rothrock who died of breast cancer in 2010. The next time we meet a prochoice or reproductive justice advocate, perhaps a mentee of Robin Rothrock's, may they ask us "Where are the churches?" As the Unitarian Universalist ministry, may we be able to answer "We are right here."

Yours in Faith and Works,

Darcy Baxter, M.Div
Pastoral Counselor, Exhale

PS: The [Congregational Resource Packet for Reproductive Justice](#) has materials that can help you and your congregation connect to others in your community, to deepen your awareness of these issues and strengthen your advocacy efforts. The Witness Ministries staff at the UUA are available to support you and your congregation as you work to make reproductive justice a reality in our communities: just email womenissues@uua.org.

Resources for Pastoral Care

[Clergy for Choice](#)

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

[Clergy Aloud](#)

Faith Aloud

[After-Abortion Counseling](#)

[Project Voice](#)

Exhale

[Professional Trainings](#)

Backline

[A Guide to Emotional and Spiritual Resolution After an Abortion](#)

PregnancyOptions.info

Decision Assessment and Counseling in Abortion Care: Philosophy and Practice

(chapters on Spiritual Conflict and Moral Conflict)

[Available on Amazon.com](#)

Alissa Perucci

Sermon Archive

Have you preached about reproductive justice, or heard a great sermon on these subjects?
Let us know! Email womensissues@uua.org.

Sermons on Reproductive Justice

["A Womb of One's Own"](#)

Rev. Tamara Lebak, June 2012

["Women's Service"](#)

Rev. Meg Riley, April 2012

["Sex in Church?!"](#)

Rev. Rob Keithan, February 2012

["Whom Do We Serve?"](#)

Darcy Baxter, January 2012

["The Theology of Reproductive Justice"](#)

Rev. Matthew Westfox (UCC), January 2012

["Personhood"](#)

Rev. Dr. Linda Olsen Peebles, January 2012

["Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing: A New Movement"](#)

Rev. Debra Haffner, July 2011

["Reproductive Compassion: A Mother's Day Sermon" \(PDF\)](#)

Darcy Baxter, May 2011

["Idolatry of Anti-Choice" \(PDF\)](#)

Jennifer Dant, December 2010 (Skinner Sermon Award Recipient)

["Home of the Brave"](#)

Rev. Marti Keller, July 2006

["For All That Is Our Life"](#) (search on page for "Rebecca Parker")

Rev. Rebecca Parker, April 2004

["Real Men Value Women's Rights"](#)

Rev. Philip Douglas, June 2001

Resources for Sermons and Worship

Want to add a resource to add to the list? Let us know! Email womensissues@uua.org.

Abortion and Life (Goodreads.com [review](#))

Jennifer Baumgardener

Sacred Work (Google Books [review](#))

Tom Davis

Abortion My Choice, God's Grace (Google Books [review](#))

Anne Marie Eggebroten

Our Choices, Our Lives (Google Books [review](#))

Krista Jacob

Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After Roe V. Wade

Carole Joffe (Google Books [review](#))

Sacred Choices (Google Books [review](#))

Daniel Maguire

[Prayerfully Pro-Choice: Worship Resources](#)

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

[Worship Resources](#)

Religious Institute

[Reproductive Justice Letters and Topics](#)

Religious Institute

Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for RJ (Google Books [review](#))

Jael Miriam Silliman

This Common Secret (Google Books [review](#))

Susan Wicklund, M.D

Unitarian Universalist Theology of Reproductive Justice

Four themes, fundamental to the Unitarian Universalist tradition, are central to a theological understanding of reproductive justice: conscience, justice, sacred sexuality, and reverence for life.

Conscience

Women, and all people, are moral agents who possess dignity, freedom of conscience, and the capacity to make decisions according to the sacred within them. We carry the wisdom from our religious ancestors that coercion, particularly over the most precious and intimate circumstances of our lives, is not only wrong, but also breeds hatred and bitterness. Whether people are made in the image of God, having the power to create and sustain life, or are in a sacred partnership with God to co-create life, every person has access to spiritual truths within and beyond them which guide their decision-making. Both Unitarians and Universalists, historically, have rejected ideas of predestination or original sin, perpetuating instead a theology of sacred human choices between right and wrong. Unitarian Universalists and other people of faith come together in religious community for the pursuit of truth and meaning, and the discernment to live their lives accordingly. People have a sacred obligation to support each other and their children in this pursuit.

Justice

As a faith tradition attentive to sacred discernment, free will, and the lived reality of human beings, rather than dogma or creed, Unitarian Universalism calls its members to recognize the sacredness of every person. In congregations and the public sphere, Unitarian Universalists work for justice, equity, and compassion in ways that create respect from tolerance and transforms simple diversity into the beloved community, though ideas of power, privilege, oppression, and love. Drawing upon the teachings of Jesus and the words and deeds of other prophetic people, Unitarian Universalists know that in the interdependent web of life, no lives are independent of another.

Universalist theologians of the past believed that rather than being fixated on salvation after death, humans should concern themselves with salvation in this world. They refused to believe that suffering and violence were simply part of “God’s plan,” over which humans had no control. Instead, humans are responsible for taking care of one another, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized. People are responsible for “saving” each other.

Today, because each life is inextricably connected to every other life, because of the human capacity to alleviate much of the suffering we witness and experience, Unitarians and Universalists are dedicated to creating a world of justice, equity, and compassion for all.

Sacred Sexuality

Believing in human goodness and concerned with the flourishing of life in its inherent interdependence, Unitarian Universalism holds that sexuality is a sacred and powerful gift. Sexuality provides people with opportunities to grow in intimacy with each other and the sacred, as well as opportunities for harm and exploitation. As a powerful force that contributes to love and justice, as well as to intense discord and pain, people are responsible for being stewards of this tremendous capacity. Human sexuality must be understood and celebrated in its complexity, diversity, and possibility. Unitarian Universalists take great joy and pride in teaching comprehensive sexuality education to all age groups within their congregations and in advocating for the same in the public sphere.

Reverence for Life

Unitarian Universalists draw spiritual sustenance from the experience of being human, from “that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves [one] to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life,” (Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources). In the interdependent web which creates, sustains, and remembers all life, each person has a right to health and protection. Because Unitarian Universalists believe they are a part of life, not owners of it, they are called to be responsible and wise participants the web of life and stewards of its power and resources. With a deep reverence for life in its complexity and diversity, Unitarian Universalists do not agree on the precise moment in which life begins, or continues. They are, however, united in their affirmation for the well-being of women and others, and their interest in requiring public policy to be concerned with the same.