REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Our beliefs in upholding the human rights of all and in sexuality as a gift to be celebrated call us into the reproductive justice movement. Families, relationships, and our sense of beloved community enrich our shared lives and remind us of the importance of healthy sexuality within supportive social and political environments. Our commitments to love, acceptance, freedom of conscience, and multiculturalism inspire us in working toward a more just world.

The world we envision includes social, political, legal, and economic systems that support everyone’s freedom of reproductive choice and expression of gender identity and sexuality. In such a world all communities are places of equality, abundance and safety, free from violence, oppression, and hazardous environments. This world includes access to affordable, culturally appropriate and safe child care and health care. In our vision everyone has access to accurate, safe, healthy, and culturally-appropriate reproductive health services and information about sexuality and family planning.

As Unitarian Universalists, we embrace the reproductive justice framework, which espouses the right to have children, not have children, and parent children in safe and healthy environments (SisterSong). To this we add that all people have the right to bodily autonomy and self-expression with regards to their gender and sexuality.

History
Our faith tradition has a long history of progressive witness for freedom and justice. Soon after the merger of Universalism and Unitarianism, the new Association (1961) adopted statements in support of civil rights and the rights of women. In time, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations added advocacy for those facing oppression based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. One of the first Statements of Conscience addressed “Economic Injustice, Poverty and Racism” (2000). With programs such as Welcoming Congregations, Journey Toward Wholeness, Jubilee, and Beyond Categorical Thinking, our congregations, members, and the Association worked on implementing those beliefs. We have long been leaders in the comprehensive sexuality education movement as well, offering education across the lifespan within our congregations (About Your Sexuality, then Our Whole Lives). We also advocated for the same in the public sphere.

Rooted in our work on women’s rights, reproductive rights, and a commitment to multiculturalism and anti-oppression, Unitarian Universalists came to the reproductive justice movement at a critical moment in history. The reproductive justice movement, with leadership from a women-of-color reproductive justice collective known as SisterSong, emerged because neither the predominantly white middle class women’s rights and reproductive rights movements nor the predominately male civil rights movement addressed the unique range of issues that women of color faced. Those issues have included forced sterilization, forced contraception, and higher rates of removal of children due to accusations of abuse or neglect. These issues, coupled with systemic racism, have frequently made parenting or co-parenting more difficult due to unequal implementation of laws, unequal
incarceration rates, prohibitions imposed on ex-felons, and economic insecurity.

The reproductive justice movement envisions the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, gender identities, classes, and cultural and racial identities. Such liberation requires living wages, safe and supported housing, high quality medical and reproductive health care, affordable legal representation, paid parental leave, affordable childcare, and control of reproductive choices.

Because of its historically Anglo/White dominant culture, Unitarian Universalism tends to be culturally white and has not always responded in ways most helpful to disenfranchised, minority communities out of ignorance rather than malice. Thus, as participants in the Reproductive Justice movement, Unitarian Universalists must often take their lead from, act in solidarity with, and be accountable to partnership with communities of color, using their positions of power in support of those communities’ priorities. The reproductive justice framework “represents a shift for women advocating for control of their bodies -- from a narrower focus on legal access and individual choice... to a broader analysis of racial, economic, cultural, and structural constraints on [their] power. Reproductive justice addresses the social reality of inequality, specifically, the inequality of opportunities that [women of color] have to control [their] reproductive destiny.” (From “Why is Reproductive Justice Important for Women of Color?” on the SisterSong website). Both those affected and their allies have important roles to play. Unitarian Universalists are laying the groundwork for the transformative power of multicultural organizing in partnership with reproductive justice organizations and leaders, looking to those most affected for leadership.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

As Unitarian Universalists we covenant to uphold our sixth principle, which affirms the goal of peace, liberty, and justice for all. Liberty and justice includes our bodies. We are all embodied, sexual beings with varying abilities, preferences, and identities. Unitarian Universalism calls us to advocate for the positive expression of sexuality, including choices about reproduction and nurturing, and for a culture of respect and empowerment. Our commitment to liberty and justice calls us to support and partner with historically oppressed communities as we work together to build the world we dream about. In order to achieve peace, liberty, and justice, Unitarian Universalists must listen to and follow the lead of the marginalized and disadvantaged, reach outside our cultural assumptions, and honestly and humbly acknowledge our own shortcomings.

Unitarian Universalists support gender equity, positive sexuality, diverse sexual expression, and the full flowering of nurturing relationships and families. We affirm the individual’s right to choose and recognize that such choices are influenced by social and political systems as well as by factors such as racial/cultural identity, economic status, immigration/citizenship status, relationship with the criminal justice system, health status, and ability. Our religious tradition directs us to respect the diversity of faith traditions that surround us and insists that no singular religious viewpoint or creed guide the policies of our governments. We also recognize,
however, that the use of patriarchal, sex-negative and oppressive ideologies in the name of religion can limit liberty and justice.

Our pluralistic congregations include diverse beliefs, backgrounds, and personal stories. We do not agree on many issues, including when life begins and the rights of the unborn. Yet we unite in striving to live out the values and principles that call us to work for reproductive justice in spite of the complexities of the issues.

ACTIONS
We commit to putting our values into action, striving for equality and justice and honoring the rights, needs and choices of others. Affirming the interconnected web of life with justice for all people, we commit to undertake actions that could include the following.

As individuals we can

- Study reproductive justice issues, including sexuality, gender identity, classism, and racism.
- Acknowledge personal biases and stories.
- Work to accept one’s own body, sexuality, and abilities.
- Adopt spiritual practices that contribute to self-care.
- Advocate for reproductive justice and related issues through op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, letters and visits to legislators, and direct action.
- Volunteer with organizations such as Planned Parenthood, abortion clinics, women’s shelters, and child and family community support centers.
- Protest violations of basic human rights.
- Support reproductive health-abortion clinics that are experiencing demonstrations.
- Effect positive change within our own social circles and professions.
- Join SisterSong or other reproductive justice groups as a member or an ally member.
- Consider candidates’ positions on these issues when voting.
- Work to eliminate barriers to services (economic, educational, language, accessibility, etc.).
- Provide leadership in our congregation and community on these issues.
- Financially contribute to organizations that help women fund abortions and that advocate for reproductive justice issues, including the social determinants underlying racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressions.

In our relationships we can

- Respect all people and their decisions, even those we disagree with.
- Minister to one another around reproductive health issues.
- Be open and listen to others’ stories, practicing acceptance for other life experiences and lived realities.
- Accept people of all abilities, identities, and generations as sexual beings.
- Accompany others wanting support (i.e. during abortion, while seeking government assistance, making decisions for their families, during childbirth).
- Teach children and youth about and model healthy sexuality and relationships.
- Seek and accept leadership from people most affected by reproductive injustice.
In our congregations we can

- Form a Reproductive Justice group, task force, or committee.
- Invite SisterSong or other reproductive justice groups such as The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health to conduct reproductive justice trainings.
- Connect religious professionals and lay leaders with organizations and networks that promote reproductive and economic justice and human rights.
- Connect members and friends of our congregations to affinity groups, resources, and education in our Association and communities.
- Expect religious professionals and lay leaders to participate in reproductive justice-related education and training.
- Provide ministry and pastoral care that is inclusive of all people and reproductive justice issues.
- Offer worship, discussion, and small group ministry on reproductive justice issues.
- Develop and promote congregational statements on reproductive justice.
- Provide spaces, programs, and teaching for community groups working on reproductive justice issues.
- Provide education to children, youth and adults that is age, ability, and identity appropriate.
- Join with state legislative ministry organizations and interfaith networks in their advocacy for reproductive rights or organize such advocacy.
- Communicate reproductive justice information using the congregation’s virtual community networks, newsletters, and orders of service.
- Implement Safe Congregations guidelines and practices.
- Continue Welcoming Congregation advocacy and education efforts related to gender and sexuality.
- Reach out and participate in interfaith and secular work on racism, classism, gender and/or sexual health issues.
- Accept breastfeeding in our shared spaces.

As an Association we can

- Publicly witness for reproductive justice.
- Advocate for just legislation and policies, access to reproductive health information and services, and the rights of families and individuals at the state and federal levels.
- Advocate for the right to access reproductive health information and services.
- Support state legislative ministry organizations in their work that supports reproductive justice.
- Provide curricula, resources, current information, and networking opportunities that congregations can use in their reproductive justice education and advocacy efforts.
- Collaborate with other faith-based and secular organizations working for reproductive justice and related issues.
- Present reproductive justice workshops at district/regional meetings.

With open minds, helping hands, and loving hearts, we work toward reproductive justice, and commit to replacing shame with compassion, fear with acceptance, judgment with love, and insecurity with safety.