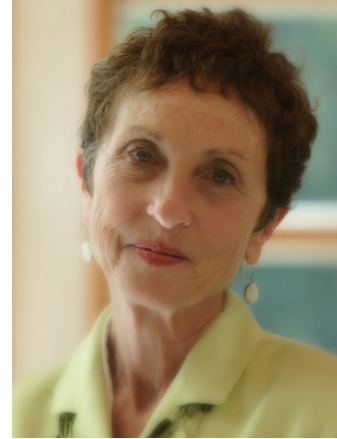


# *Leaping from Our Spheres*

**2014-2018 Blog by Rev. Marti Keller**

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## **UUWF Signs On to Interfaith Letters Opposing Supreme Court Nominee**



Despite calls to delay hearings on this administration's second chance to shape the Supreme Court for years to come until after the November elections, or at least until after Senators have had the chance to read through much delayed background documents on the current nominee, the hearings have begun.

Shortly before the beginning of the Senate Judiciary committee proceedings on the nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) the *New York Times* published an analysis of how a Supreme Court shaped by Trump could restrict access to abortion. The just-departed Judge Anthony Kennedy was described in the article as a "cautious supporter of abortion rights." Based on what is known about Kavanaugh, if confirmed "the Supreme Court would have a conservative, five member majority that would most likely sustain sharp restrictions on access to abortion in the United States," the *Times* speculated.

Even if this court does not overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark case that legalized abortion nationwide as a constitutional right, this SCOTUS could (in its most extreme rulings and considered very unlikely) rule that fetuses are persons protected by the constitution. Therefore, abortion would be murder. Or the court could abolish the right to privacy, decided in a decision on the legality of contraceptives in 1965, eliminating the legal foundation for the right to abortion as well as birth control and same sex marriage.

Most likely, according to the *New York Times* analysts, a court with a conservative majority would allow states to impose new restrictions on abortion, reinterpreting what "undue burden" is in terms

of access to safe legal abortions. It could “interpret that standard narrowly,” allowing states to impose more and more barriers to access and much more leeway to restrict abortions.

Reproductive rights would, in all likelihood, be under attack for the foreseeable future. Because of these harrowing possibilities, the UUWF has signed on to two letters calling for careful scrutiny of, and pointed questions to, Judge Kavanaugh in the course of Senate deliberations on his nomination to the SCOTUS. One letter focused on separation of church and government and the other, more specifically, on threats to reproductive choice including access to abortion nationwide.

We have joined with 36 other national, faith-based, nontheist, and religious liberty organizations to “share a commitment to individual freedom and the separation of religion and government.” [In this letter](#) to all U.S. Senators, we pointed to the dissent Judge Kavanaugh wrote in *Priests for Life v U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. He sided with a religious organization that argued that filling out a form to request a religious exemption from providing insurance coverage for birth control burdened its religious exercise. He was at odds with eight of the nine federal appeals courts that heard challenges on the same religious exemptions. In our letter, we expressed concerns that Judge Kavanaugh “could require the government to carve out religious exemptions even when they would cause real harm to other people.”

UUWF has signed a [second interfaith letter](#), this one to the Senate Judiciary Committee, stating that “we are deeply troubled by Judge Kavanaugh’s record of statements and decisions on issues related to reproductive health and the right to make private decisions without impediment or imposition.”

“We fear that Judge Kavanaugh, if confirmed, will not uphold the right of each pregnant woman to make the choice for her circumstances—including the choice to seek an abortion—by her own conscience in consultation with her doctor, faith, and values... Judge Kavanaugh’s views on the civil right to choose abortion and the sacred right to bodily autonomy gives us great pause over his confirmation to the highest court of our land.”

“In light of President Trump’s explicit promise to nominate Justices who will overturn *Roe*, and of Judge Kavanaugh’s past statements and rulings, we urge the Committee to carefully scrutinize Judge Kavanaugh’s entire record and demand clear, direct, and substantive answers. We further hope the Senate will reject any nominee who will not safeguard individual moral agency or the fundamental principles of religious freedom enshrined in our Constitution.”

September 6, 2018 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog, church and state, kavanaugh, reproductive rights, supreme court, unitarian, uuwf](#)

## Weeping for Hungry Families



When I was a new minister, I served a UU congregation in a small Southern town that, on the surface, was a popular weekend tourist destination: a place to go gold panning, visit the burgeoning wineries, grab a bite on the historic square.

But in the back “hollers,” the vestiges of hard scrabble Appalachia remained and remains, with children—I heard and came to know—who were more often than not too cold (because heating bills went unpaid) in the mountain winters to make it up for school. There were church charities and a community “helping place” to help fill the gap between inconsistent and low wage paychecks and need. But it was not enough in a reliable way to alleviate the suffering—or the pull up by your bootstraps

shame—that dogged the lives of these poor rural households.

In the middle of farm country, it was the federal Farm Bill and the food stamps or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) contained within it that made significant difference in staving off hunger. Currently, 70 percent of SNAP participants are in families with children, children like those who lived too invisibly in Lumpkin County, Georgia.

This longstanding national commitment to what the organization [Faith in Public Life](#) declares is “a shared moral responsibility to ensure that no one in the United States goes hungry” is now under partisan attack, particularly devastating low income working families, and a high percentage of these single women with children.

The proposed bill cuts SNAP participants’ benefits by more than \$17 million and diverts much of that money, according to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) (CBPP), to “a scheme of ineffective work programs and unforgiving penalties.” The legislation would take food away from households (for example, those with children over 6 years old) who don’t prove every month that they work enough hours or qualify for an underfunded program to help find jobs. This, in an economy where stable employment and regular hours are becoming less the norm. And of course, childcare assistance is not provided.

The CBPP estimates that this bill, if it becomes law, will take away or cut SNAP benefits (ie. food) from more than one million families with more than 2 million people. They project that the proposed Farm Bill cuts mean there will be 13.1 billion fewer meals provided under SNAP in the next ten years.

This shift in policy and these cuts come on the heels of a \$1.9 trillion tax cut bill, where safety net programs for poor people, disabled people, and elderly people are targeted as sources of Congressional budget cutting to cover the cost.

There is dignity in human work, but harsh and unsupported requirements that preference work over the essential human need to have access to food on the table are cruel. They are in direct conflict with our UU first principle of affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

For women, for their children, for all of our families no matter how they are constructed, we must defeat this 2018 Farm Bill as it currently is written. The UUWF joins Faith in Public Life and other religious and secular groups in saying that these SNAP cuts and new requirements are dangerous and unacceptable.

To contact your House of Representatives member, Faith in Public Life's phone line will connect you to their home district or their DC office: 1-844-390-0619. For more information on the effects of the bill, visit the [CBPP website](#).

May 4, 2018 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [cbpp](#), [center on budget and policy priorities](#), [faith in public life](#), [farm bill](#), [snap](#)

## Equal Pay Day 2018 – What is the Wage Gap and Where Do We Go from Here?



This past Tuesday was [Equal Pay Day](#) – the date each year up to which American women must work to earn what men earned in the previous year, according to the National Committee on Pay Equity.

We join with the [National Women’s Law Center](#) and other organizations in declaring that equal pay is crucial for all women, and that much greater pay disparities for women of color and women with disabilities must be addressed forcefully and intentionally in an ongoing way.

Last year our Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) General Assembly passed a [statement of conscience](#) on escalating economic inequality in this country, stating that “our principle of justice, equity and compassion in human relations drives us to work for healthier and more equitable economic systems.” We declared the imperative for a moral economic system that would include equal pay for equal work and elimination of racial, ethnic and gendered wage and wealth gaps.

Little progress has been made in the area of wage gaps as documented by the most recent available numbers. In fact, predictions are that the pay gap is not expected to close until 2119!

According to data provided by the National Women’s Law Center, women of all races who work full time year-round are typically paid only 80 cents for every dollar paid to male counterparts. This gap in earnings amounts to \$10,086 that women lose each year. Women of all education levels experience a wage gap. Women in nearly every occupation experience a wage gap. Women are paid less for the same work. Women are over-represented in low wage jobs and under-represented in high wage ones. Women’s work (work where women are dominant in a field) is devalued because women do it.

A recent Census Bureau report revealed that the so-called “baby window” following the birth of a first child doubles the pay gap between spouses and, for younger women between 25 and 35, their pay never recovers.

But as *New York Times* gender editor [Jessica Bennett](#) pointed out “the more clear-cut (and stunning) figures come when you segment by race, as compared to white men:

- 54 cents is the amount Latina women make to the white male dollar.
- 57 cents for Native women
- 63 cents for black women
- 79 cents for white women
- 89 cents for Asian women (differentiated by region).

The pay gap for black women means that they would have to work until August 7 of this year to earn what white men earned the previous year. For Latina women, it's November 1.

Add to this: Transgender women make less after they transition. One study found that their average earnings fell by nearly one-third after transition. Women with disabilities are typically paid 73 cents for every dollar men without disabilities are paid and, compared with their male counterparts with disabilities, this figure is 76 cents.

It will take a focused, multi-pronged effort to achieve equal pay for all women. The National Women's Law Center urges us to:

- Strengthen our equal pay laws so that women are better able to fight back against pay discrimination.
- Build ladders to better paying jobs for women by removing barriers to entry into male-dominated fields.
- Lift up wages for women in low income jobs by raising the minimum wage and ensuring that tipped workers receive at least the regular minimum wage before tips.
- Increase the availability of high quality, affordable childcare.
- Help prevent and remedy caregiver discrimination and protect workers from pregnancy discrimination.
- Establish fair scheduling practices that allow employees to meet their care-giving and other responsibilities.
- Provide paid family and medical leave.
- Ensure women's access to affordable reproductive health care.
- Protect workers' ability to collectively bargain.

The UUWF joins the National Women's Law Center and other intersectional justice seeking groups in declaring once again this year that:

Every Woman Matters  
Every Dollar Matters  
Equal Pay Matters

April 13, 2018 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)





## The “Secret” is Out. Now What?

By Debra Greenwood

For those of us who have experienced the type of sexual harassment, abuse, or rape that is such a topic in the news today, there may be a mixture of feelings: relief that, finally, women are being believed and taken seriously about these assaults on us; anger that this type of abuse is so pervasive; and sadness that it continues to this day. Far too many girls and women have not experienced the human right of body integrity. Far too many (mainly men) have invaded us, disregarded us, and then discarded us.

There is a bittersweet irony to these allegations suddenly being taken seriously. This irony is not lost on those of us who are members of the “least of these” groups. Although it is definitely a good thing that women are finally being believed and action is being taken by corporations to minimize their legal exposure by purging their ranks of serial abusers, we all know that this type of behavior has gone on for a LONG time. From the time of American slavery, white, male slave owners have used their position of authority and power to rape enslaved women and children. In more recent times, housekeepers of color – who have worked for rich, white men – have been sexually victimized by their employers. Desperate to keep their jobs, there has been little or no recourse, save resignation, for these women. In order to eat, they’ve had to endure the abuse. The fact that *these* women were victimized made no real impact on society. It wasn’t until white women were more widely abused that women were believed and action taken. Much like the Catholic sexual abuse scandal, it wasn’t until **men** revealed their abuse that the whole scandal blew up and became such a blight on the church.

The lack of concern for people of color and women is a social ill that will take a lot of work to correct. It will require all of us to do soul searching and the necessary work to rid ourselves and our society of this thinking. It is work that must be done. The courageous among us have already begun this work and we are grateful for what they are doing.

However, with regard to the prevention of sexual abuse, there is work that we, as women, must do now. We must seize the time and drive the narrative of how these egregious acts are prevented and punished. It is not enough to be satisfied that our secrets are being revealed and taken seriously. We must take responsibility for our own liberation from this social scourge. We have to be the leaders in retooling social thought on how women and men experience body integrity and respect for the body integrity of others.

Prevention of these heinous and life-altering acts is the gift we give to the countless girls and boys who might be future victims.

Fortunately, work on this issue has already begun. Parents are being discouraged to “offer up” their children to family friends and relatives for hugs and kisses. Let the child decide if they want to be touched. Discussion about body integrity must be taught from an early age regarding a person’s right to allow or reject touching – of any kind.

There are many issues for us to address in this current scandal:

1. How do we regulate workplace behavior so that all workers are free of unwanted comments and behaviors?
2. If more women were in positions of power and authority, would women still experience sexual harassment at current levels?
3. What should the consequences be of violating the body integrity of others? Warnings? Treatment? Termination of employment? Arrest?
4. Why are employers paying for the unethical/illegal behavior of their employees? Shouldn't the offender be financially responsible for his/her behavior?
5. Should our tax payer money be used to pay off victims of sexual harassment/abuse?
6. How can women be assured a seat at the table when these issues are addressed?

My sisters, the time is NOW to come together for our common welfare. And when we come together, be mindful of who has a seat at your table. Is there diversity in age, color, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, and class? Do those at your table have a real voice or are they just there as window dressing? Our power and our wisdom are in our diversity.

We can do this. We must do this....

*Debra Greenwood is still a 1960s activist in 2017. She is impressed by the way young people of today organize and learns a lot from them. Along the way she has earned an RN and a PhD in Clinical Psychology. She is married to her partner of 21 years, Ida Miller. She is happiest when working to improve the world in some small way.*

December 8, 2017 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)



## Progressive Values and Scouting Today: Understanding the GSUSA and the BSA



By Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum

I've been involved with Girl Scouts USA for eight years as a troop leader and one year as a Juliette mentor – a guide for an independent Girl Scout. But when I first got involved with Girl Scouts, I was cautious. Like many people, I didn't fully understand that the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts are two completely different and separate

organizations. And like many progressives and Unitarian Universalists, I had significant differences with the Boy Scouts – who, at that time, did not include atheist scouts and gay, bisexual, and transgender scouts – and still don't clearly include atheist scouts by national policy. So I looked into Girl Scouts carefully.

What I learned quickly about Girl Scouts was that they were already progressive and open in these areas. While not perfect in their inclusion, they go a long way. So, while the word "God" is included in the Girl Scout Promise, Girl Scouts has allowed girls to substitute wording appropriate to their beliefs for the word "God" since 1993.[i] Some atheists many find their language about faith still too confining, but as an agnostic Humanist, I have substituted words like "earth," "love," and "peace" while saying the Girl Scout Law.



Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum

On the issue of sexual orientation, Girl Scouts has no policy on sexual orientation. They say that sexual orientation shouldn't be advocated for or promoted in Girl Scouts, but Scouts' sexual orientation is only their own business and shouldn't be a barrier to inclusion.[ii] The issue of advocacy is also somewhat flexible. For example, many scouts have had independent silver and gold award projects on issues related to LGBT advocacy, particularly around bullying. An independent scout project, though, is different from a troop activity.

On gender identity, Girl Scouts is definitely a girl-based organization. But the Girl Scouts are clear that any child who lives as a girl and whose family recognizes her as a girl is welcome in Girl Scouts.[iii] In practice, I've also seen children who started in Girl Scouts as girl-identified and then identified as gender-queer as they aged continue to be welcomed in Girl Scouts, as well.

Part of the reason for this difference in levels of progressive policies is structural. Boy Scouts have the majority of their troops organized through religious organizations – 68.4%, of which more than half (36.7%) are chartered through Mormon churches.[iv] In contrast, most Girl Scout troops are held in schools. I would argue, however, that part of the reason this discrepancy between Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts exists is built into the very conception of the organizations. Boy Scouts

created an organization that wouldn't admit girls. Girl Scouts created an organization designed to give girls the same opportunities that boys had. In its very creation, Girl Scouts was a feminist organization, and continues to be one, in that it is dedicated to teaching girls to be strong leaders, giving them valuable business skills and leadership skills, teaching girls about STEM careers and civic participation as well as the typical outdoor skills one expects from scouting organizations. It's no wonder that so many female governors, senators, and U.S. representatives were once Girl Scouts.

Overall, the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts have faced very different pressures from society. Over the last decade and more, the Boy Scouts have been pressured by conservatives to *stay* conservative, and by progressives to *become* progressive. The pressure has been around changing policies that were conservative. In contrast, Girl Scouts has been pressured by conservatives to *become* conservative, and faced much less pressure from progressives who were fairly content with the policies. One example of pressure Girl Scouts has faced is around sexual education. Girl Scouts has careful policies in place that require parental consent for any programs, and doesn't develop the programs themselves, but some conservative organizations point to ties that seem too close between the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, of which Girl Scouts is a member, and Planned Parenthood. There has been particular pressure on Girl Scouts about this from the Catholic Church.[v]

So given this history, what are we to make of the recent decision by Boy Scouts to allow girls into their organization? I'm hopeful that it means that Boy Scouts is continuing on its path to becoming a more open and welcoming organization. However, the very language that the Boy Scouts use to explain its decision makes me skeptical. They point to research that shows that families already involved in Boy Scouts are interested in Boy Scouts for their girls as well.[vi] What this tells me is that they're not doing this because they're interested particularly in girls' leadership and development, or about increasing opportunities for girls. And the very parents who are asking Boy Scouts to create opportunities for girls may be the same ones who are uncomfortable with Girl Scouts as an organization because of its inclusivity and progressive stances.

Personally, if I was looking for a scouting organization that I could send children of all genders to, I would look to one that's been inclusive in its programming for much longer. Camp Fire, for example, says, "Camp Fire works to realize the dignity and worth of each individual and to eliminate human barriers based on all assumptions that prejudice individuals. Designed and implemented to reduce sexual, racial, religious, and cultural stereotypes and to foster positive intercultural relationships, in Camp Fire, everyone is welcome."[vii] Navigators USA has inclusion built into their creed, "As a Navigator I promise to do my best to create a world free of prejudice and ignorance." [viii]

But if I was looking for an organization that specifically focuses on building leadership skills in girls, the answer is definitely Girl Scouts.

*Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Landrum is a UU Minister who serves the Universalist Unitarian Church of East Liberty in Clarklake, MI. She has been a Girl Scout leader and is the mother of a Juliette Girl Scout, and received a Community Spirit Award from the Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan Council in 2014.*

- [i] “Girl Scouts of the USA,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl\\_Scouts\\_of\\_the\\_USA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Scouts_of_the_USA).
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- [v] Teresa Donnellan, “A History of the Friction Between the Girl Scouts and the Catholic Church,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/05/12/history-friction-between-girl-scouts-and-catholic-church>
- [vi] “The BSA Expands Programs to Welcome Girls from Cub Scouts to Highest Rank of Eagle Scouts,” *Boy Scouts of America*, <http://www.scoutingnewsroom.org/press-releases/bsa-expands-programs-welcome-girls-cub-scouts-highest-rank-eagle-scout/>
- [vii] “Camp Fire Recognizes Dignity and Worth,” *Camp Fire*, <http://campfire.org/experience/inclusion>
- [viii] *Navigators USA*, <https://navigatorsusa.org/>

October 18, 2017 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#), [Boy Scouts](#), [girl scouts](#), [scouting](#)

## Where Loss is Felt, Grief is Known



*By Rev. Aaron Payson*

Last spring, I was invited to share my thoughts on grief and reproductive loss as part of a new series developed by the [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Justice](#) called [Sacred Crossroads](#).

This series involved both blog reflections and webcasts which interviewed an incredible group of advocates for reproductive health, rights and

justice and an attempt to shift the conversation in order to begin to reclaim the idea that those of us in the “pro-choice” movement represented a more humane and just form of “pro-life” perspectives.

For me this means that one is “pro-life” when we understand the worth and integrity of the living and the complex and often complicated challenges that the living face. My experience of the “pro-life” movement, as it is popularly experienced, is that it is actually a “pro-birth” movement with little concern for the continuing health and well-being of children and women in our world. The work of women of color who challenged us to consider the inadequacies of the “pro-choice” frame, and who advocate for reproductive justice, has helped clarify for me that the operative ethic in our movement needs to be the desire, life-circumstance, and decision-making authority of women. We must put particular attention and focus on those who have been marginalized by race, sexual orientation, and gender expression, as the focus of any strategies moving forward in the reproductive health, rights and justice movement. What I wrote last April is, in part, my own attempt to broaden the dialogue to make room for a much wider expression and acceptance of the spectrum of human and humane responses to reproductive loss and decision-making.

He did not say: You will not be troubled,  
you will not be belabored,  
you will not be afflicted;  
but he said: You will not be overcome.  
~ Mother Julian of Norwich



Rev. Aaron Payson

My calling to ministry began more than 35 years ago, not with dreams of preaching to a full sanctuary but as a first responder working with ambulance companies. This ministry began in high school as a volunteer, and continued as a professional Emergency Medical Technician during college and seminary. The calling I distilled from this vocation was one of trained physical care and compassionate companionship with people during some of the most traumatic times of their lives. Such service

encompassed the experience of the entire spectrum of human response to crisis: moments of stress, pain, suffering, anxiety, fear, grief, gladness, humor and, in precious few moments, unbridled joy. As I reflect back, I recognize in each of these experiences expressions of human integrity and sacred moments, moments of awareness and awakening to the larger connections that sustain us and often permeate such critical life experiences.

As a parish minister I have maintained my connection to the first responder community as part of a community crisis response teams that companioned first responders and others through the initial aftermath of traumatic incidents, providing psychological, emotional and spiritual care. These experiences turned into primary lessons for ministry: the art of compassionate presence, the importance of individual integrity, the necessity of trust in others, faith in the human spirit and the spirit that transcends all, the call to create a more just world, the power of the human voice as well as both the strength and fragility of the web of existence which holds us all. But perhaps the most profound lesson from this service is the normalcy and necessity of grief as a basic human response to experiences of profound change, and the importance of recognizing and responding to the reality of grief by those who are grieving and those who support them. And I have carried this learning into all of the areas of my ministry to and with others.

One area of ministry where these lessons have been most profound, and in many ways most challenging, has been with women who face reproductive crises. I have been a member of the [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice](#) for more than 17 years. I have served this organization as an affiliate president, and as a member and treasurer of the national Board of Directors. I have also served as an All Options counselor and trainer. All Options Counseling is a mode of spiritual companionship with women who face critical decisions regarding their reproductive capacity, often when the decision whether to carry a pregnancy to term or terminate a pregnancy has reached a point of crisis. It is a form of counseling that places, at its center, the unique circumstances and life reality of the one who faces a crisis and invites the exploration of the spectrum of options available her given such circumstances. It is a form of counseling that recognizes and honors the integrity and inherent moral capacity of women to choose that direction which she deems most responsible. This too is a process that often encompasses the spectrum of human response to crisis.

Often, however, those of us in the reproductive health, rights and justice movement have been so focused on advocating for women's right to choose, we have neglected to create space for them to grieve. Grief is a normal response to reproductive health decisions, especially as these relate to the decision to terminate a pregnancy. That a woman would decide upon terminating a pregnancy as the most responsible decision given her circumstances does not preclude the reality that grief and sorrow can be, and often is, a normal response. That we in the reproductive health, rights, and justice movement have too often ignored this reality simply stigmatizes those who experience this most human response to loss as illegitimate. And for those who oppose this decision, the presence of grief is often identified as a symptom that the decision was both wrong and harmful. Neither position has demonstrated the humane sensitivity that the presence of grief can be constitutive of any experience of human loss. Neglecting this human reality is a spiritual shortcoming and negates our responsibility as caring people to companion those who feel loss on their own terms — not dependent on those dictated by movements in support or opposition to the decision itself. It is our spiritual responsibility to journey with our sisters as they experience life crises and losses.

*In his 26<sup>th</sup> year of ministry in Unitarian Universalism, Rev. Aaron Payson is Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester, MA, where he has served for over 18 years. He has been active in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice since the early 2000s and is engaged in a variety of local rights and justice efforts. He lives in Worcester with his spouse, Kristen Payson, and their children, Morgaine and Charlie.*

October 6, 2017 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#), [grief](#), [loss](#), [pro choice](#), [pro life](#), [reproductive justice](#)



## Firsts

I am not and never have been a *Time Magazine* subscriber.



At one time in my much younger life someone paid for a year's worth of *Newsweek*, which I enjoyed, but not enough to continue. But when I caught a morning talk show interview with editor-in-chief Nancy Gibbs previewing and promoting a *Time* special project—[Firsts-women who are changing the world](#), I went in determined search of the September 18 issue.

I learned that if you are not a signed up paid reader, it was not easy to score a copy, at least not in a timely manner. It took several return trips to the Barnes and Noble periodical section, and an expedited delivery purchase on ebay (mailed carefully in do-not-bend packaging). I tore it open, eager to read about what Gibbs had described as the “experiences of women who were pioneers in their field,” hopefully in a positive way. The venture had taken more than a year, after having been proposed by Kira Pollack, the magazine’s

director of photography and visual enterprise. What began as a series of portraits, in the words of the editor-in-chief, quickly evolved into a multimedia project including dozens of interviews and a book.

What were the “striking themes”?

“The importance of joy, the fierce motivational force of failure, the satisfaction of successes both achieved and shared.”

The section profiling 50 women who were firsts, starts on page 64. It follows articles on a U.S. commander’s year on the front line against ISIS; the new NFL season; and the prospect for civil war in Venezuela—all with male bylines. There is a feature on California Governor Jerry Brown titled “The Philosopher King,” written by a female reporter, Katy Steinmetz.

The women whose lives and accomplishments are described range in age from 16 to 87, and as Nancy Gibbs writes, with stories of success knitted with stories of setbacks.” Women talk about the people who tried to stop them as making them more determined, of the lack of role models, and the large roles played by the men in their lives: older brothers who were first competitors, and fathers who believed in them. And the “special place in hell,” as former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says, “For women who do not help each other.”

Among those selected: Aretha Franklin, who was the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; Sylvia Earle, the first woman to become chief scientist of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Mo’ne Davis, the first girl to pitch a shutout and win a game in the Little League World Series.

Among the women in color selected were Mae Jemison, the first in space; Issa Rae, first black woman to create and star in a premium cable series, Ursula Burns, first black woman to run a Fortune 500 company, and Rita Moreno, first Latina to win an Emmy, a Grammy, and Tony.

And of course Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first woman to win a major party's nomination for President of the United States who says, "being the first of any adventure or achievement does have added pressure. You want to be the first to open the door to others, and you hope you're not the last."

Nancy Gibbs' legacy gift to Time Magazine may well be this special project, providing for younger woman, as she had set as a goal, "many other women of dramatically different backgrounds... and everyone gets to choose their own icons." As the first woman-identified editor-in-chief of this venerable weekly, her name belongs in this pantheon.

Shortly after announcing its imminent arrival on newsstands, she [submitted her resignation](#).

September 29, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [firsts](#), [Nancy Gibbs](#), [Time magazine](#), [WOC](#), [women changing the world](#)



## [A Moral Economic System: Beyond Labor Day 2017](#)



Labor Day has come and gone in 2017. What began as a nationwide day to recognize the contributions and trials of American workers has become, in most ways, the last three-day summer weekend consisting of cookouts and festivals and trips to school supply stores to fill carts with pencils, notebooks, and lunch boxes.

This year, Labor Day was also shadowed by the damage inflicted by Hurricane Harvey and the threat of an even more devastating category five storm making its way from Africa across the Atlantic, heading for the Caribbean, most likely Florida, and beyond. These climatic weather events — along with the news of a looming presidential announcement about the insecure future of thousands of young people in the DACA program — focused attention away from issues like the gender pay gap, family leave, and affordable childcare.

In the midst of the always-hyperactive news cycle there were, however, timely articles and op-ed pieces — notably in the *New York Times* — that lifted up the status of working women in this country. And the news is not favorable.

In the business section, in a story on economic trends, reporter Neil Irwin told of two female janitors at two major companies, then and now. He laid out, in great and grave detail, the differences between the work story of Gail Evans, who cleaned offices at Eastman Kodak's campus in Rochester, New York in the 1980s, and Marta Ramos, who is employed to do the same work at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino, California today.

As Irwin reports, “The \$16.60 that Ms. Ramos earns as a janitor at Apple works out to be about the same in inflation-adjusted terms as what Ms. Evans earned 35 years ago. But that’s where the similarities end.”

The difference results from what Irwin identifies as a new management theory that has been widely embraced, to focus on core competence and outsource the rest. While making companies possibly more productive and clearly more profitable to share holders, at the same time, he points out, it has fueled inequality and economic struggle for working class Americans, many of them women.

As a full-time employee of Kodak, Ms. Evans’ received generous paid vacation, a bonus payment every year, some cash assistance for college tuition and, when the campus she cleaned shut down, help in finding another job cutting film.

Ms. Ramos, on the other hand, is not an Apple employee. She works for a contractor that does not provide for vacation, so she hasn’t taken one in years because she can’t afford to lose wages. There are no bonuses, tuition assistance, or possibility of finding another position at Apple.

The Kodak employee was able to leverage her subsidized training and subsequent college degree to secure a professional-track job in information technology. The Apple employee may eventually become a janitorial team leader, which pays an extra 50 cents an hour.

**For one woman, cleaning floors was a start. For the other, that work is also a ceiling.**

This op-ed piece describes, in thoughtful detail, the consequences of a corporate structure and culture in which success are achieved by streamlining its direct workforce and bidding out the rest. The smaller the employee count, the bigger the profits. But also, the fewer benefits and opportunities for advancement.

Another piece published this Labor Day weekend in the *New York Times*, by *Nation Magazine* opinion writer Bryce Covert, proposed that participation of American women in the workforce peaked two decades ago at 60.3 percent in April 2000. Before World War II, he reminded us, women of color and single women “almost always worked,” with a large influx during the time when so many men were away on the battlefields.

In the decades following, Covert observed, the gender gap shrunk, education levels for women rose, and the availability of contraceptives allowed women more control over their reproductive lives and therefore their careers.

The rise of percentage of women in the job force came to a halt in the new millennia. Today, the number is just over 57 percent. For college educated women, having a degree has become less and less an advantage. Husbands’ wages grew faster than that of their wives in the 1990s, the gender gap discouraging more and more women from staying at work. For lower wage women, working conditions have gotten worse: erratic schedules, later hours, expensive or unavailable childcare, and lack of paid family leave.

The United States is now 17<sup>th</sup> in female labor force participation in the developed world, falling precipitously from ninth in 1990. There are 12.7 million more women without paying jobs than in 2000.

The countries whose women are in the workplace in higher percentages are gaining still, due in part to paid family leave, subsidized childcare, and flexible work arrangements.

Last June at our UUA General Assembly, the latest statement of conscience on escalating economic equality was passed overwhelmingly. The statement recognized that women are especially vulnerable to economic inequity, with “a gender pay gap that has life-long financial effects and contributes directly to increased poverty levels for women of all ages, races, and cultural backgrounds.” It also identified access to paid family leave and other economic support for those who care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities — and comprehensive reproductive health services — as key to a moral economic system.

The UUWF remains committed to intersectional economic justice and the collective and individual actions needed to make this a reality.

September 7, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Sweet Honey of Celebration and Gratitude



Rev. Monica Dobbins

Last Friday, I thanked John McCain on Facebook for voting with Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins against the “skinny repeal” of the Affordable Care Act, effectively killing the repeal effort. Soon after, I realized that many of my friends were posting outrage that the male senator was getting all the credit, while the two women who’ve been siding with Democrats for months were being ignored. Was I not also outraged about this blatant display of sexism?

There’s definitely truth to that. I am only one of millions of women who has had the experience of seeing a man get all the credit for something I’ve been doing for months. I’ve had my great ideas stolen by men, right before my eyes. I’ve felt the humiliation of not realizing what was happening until it was too late to advocate for myself. Sexism is real – it is not behind us, not by a long shot – and it hurts.

And I’m angry with McCain for the way he did this: setting himself up as the savior of the Senate, inviting journalists to “watch the show” rather than answer their questions. Watch the “show” – is it just a show to you, Senator? As if millions of lives didn’t depend on this decision?

And yet: this vote *was* a victory. One person joined with two other people, one person picked up their courage, to do the right thing. It was a victory! I am choosing to celebrate that.

There’s a story about a son who loses his way, takes all his money and runs off to waste it in wild living. When the money runs out, he crawls back home and asks his father to take him back. The father is overjoyed at the return of his precious child, and wines and dines the foolish young man. Meanwhile, the guy’s older brother seethes with resentment: I’ve been here the whole time, doing what I was supposed to do. I’ve never failed you; why is he getting all the credit?

The father replies: “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this lost one has been found.”

I believe that, in that moment, the young man’s father made a decision, not so much in favor of one son or the other, but about what kind of life he wanted for himself. He decided he didn’t want to live a life of bitterness and anger. He chose joy, at the cost of the satisfaction of retribution.

No justice movement can survive in the long run fueled only by fury. The bitter herb of outrage must be followed by the sweet honey of celebration and gratitude. Otherwise, our hearts become corroded and hope trickles away through the rust-holes. We must cultivate gratitude, even when its recipient’s motives are cheap; not because the person always deserves our gratitude but because *we* deserve to live lives of gratitude. We deserve to live in gardens that grow wild with the fragrance of gratitude, tending even the smallest and roughest of blooms – believing, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that people can change, that they can do the right thing, if only just this once. Like forgiveness, gratitude is not just a gift I give to others – it is a gift I give to myself.

I'm not ignoring the sexism of the praise of John McCain in this moment. But as a former recipient of ACA health coverage, coverage that protected my family during a risky time in our lives, I'm choosing to celebrate and give thanks. It's neither simple nor easy, but it's what feels right for me. I have faith that the celebration will sustain me longer, for all the fights to come.

So: thank you, Senator McCain, for doing the right thing. Thank you, Senators Murkowski and Collins, for being steady in the face of sexist threats. Thank you, Democrats, for holding the position. Thank you, protesters, for sacrificing your time and resources to show up for justice. Thank you, thank you, thank you all.

*Rev. Monica Dobbins is the Assistant Minister of the First Unitarian Church in Salt Lake City, Utah.*

July 31, 2017 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#), [collins](#), [health insurance](#), [insurance](#), [mccain](#), [monica dobbins](#), [murkowski](#), [obamacare](#), [skinny repeal](#)

## All\* Above All



A few years back, it was my privilege and pleasure to visit Washington D.C. during a stop on what All\* Above All, a group of abortion rights advocates, called a Be Bold Road Trip. These advocates covered nearly 10,000 miles and 12 cities, taking their message across the country. They wanted legislators to lift bans on abortion coverage for low income women. Additionally, they would be asking members of Congress and others to sign a Be Bold Declaration in support of finally including insurance coverage for this legal medical procedure under Medicaid and other federal plans.

Medicare recipients would be affected, along with federal employees and their dependents; Peace Corps volunteers; Native American women; women in federal prisons and detention centers; immigration detainees; and low-income women in the District of Columbia.

All\* Above All was formed to create united reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations, secular and faith-based, in a steadfast effort to make abortion economically accessible to all women. They particularly acknowledged hardships for poor women, immigrant women, young women, women of color, transgender people, and gender-nonconforming people.

The organization's motivation is grounded in the basic values of autonomy—being able to make personal life decisions without interference from politicians—and improving women's health and fair treatment.

The amount of money a woman has or doesn't have, organizers declared, should not prohibit her from having an abortion. However we feel about abortion, they maintain, politicians shouldn't be allowed to deny a woman's health coverage just because she's poor. They observed that, in many cases, denying Medicaid and other federal plan coverage accomplishes the real agenda of anti-choice legislators—to make abortions unaffordable and therefore unattainable for large numbers of women.

The UU Women's Federation signed on to All\* Above All in 2014. This is a bold and brave group of people committed to not settling for just keeping abortion legal if the procedure becomes impossible to obtain due to access and economic reasons. Along with more than 50 other groups, we have signed a [letter](#) to the chair and ranking members of the House Committee on Appropriations asking them to reject policy riders (stipulations) in the fiscal year 2018 appropriations legislation that would withhold insurance coverage and funding for comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion.

I continue to applaud this tenacious, ambitious, “woke” coalition. As the letter reminds our elected officials, “These policies have harmed our families, our communities, and our health far too long.”

July 13, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## UUA Celebrates First Elected Woman President

As my colleague in ministry, Rev. Meg Barnhouse, declared last week, “Let the celebrations begin! We’re embarked on a chapter with our first elected woman president of the UUA.”



Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, minister of the Phoenix, Arizona congregation, will be our 9th president since the Unitarians and the Universalists joined together. She will serve as the leader of a progressive faith movement encompassing 1,000 congregations with 200,000 adults and children in the United States.

Immediately following the announcement of her victory on June 24, the last evening of our General Assembly in New Orleans, the UUWF posted on Facebook that “history was made tonight within Unitarian Universalism.”

As reported by the UU World, after having been named winner in a three-way race of woman-identified candidates Frederick-Gray said, “I want to be clear, right up front, I am not the first female president of the UUA.” She then turned to applaud the Rev. Sofia Betancourt, who had served three months as one of three co-presidents appointed to complete the term of President Peter Morales.

The UUWF conducted interviews with the presidential candidates and published the transcripts on our website prior to the election. Here are a few of the highlights of the conversation with Frederick-Gray:

### **How do you see the relationship between the UUA and the UUWF currently?**

“I think the UUWF as a source of growing women’s leadership for the larger movement is really important ... I think that one of the ways the Associate organizations can be in a stronger relationship with the UUA is through collaborative conversations about the future of our faith ... How we imagine the next 25 years of Unitarian Universalism ... needs to be informed by women’s voices. It needs to be informed by people of color. I think that’s a key thing.”

### **What do you feel is the most pressing issue for women within our denomination?**

“I think we still have a lot of work to do in overcoming patriarchal structures. Overcoming patriarchy even in our own faith ... [O]ne of the challenges is feeling like a perception (which has truth in it) ... that half our ministry currently is women. That we have a long history of women’s leadership in our faith. But we haven’t really overcome all the obstacles to women and women’s voices shaping how we run our association. How we lead as a spiritual and moral faith community, and so probably one of the challenges is figuring out how to continue to move forward, to continue to encourage and push our association forward in collaborative and non-oppressive ways of being and leading.”

### **What are your pet projects or personal passions on behalf of UU women and girls?**

“Healthcare for women and girls. Healthcare for mothers ... [T]his is an issue where, across the board, whether it’s cuts to childcare stipends, cuts to food stamps, cuts to women’s health and

reproductive care. These are all going to be incredibly damaging to families, to women, to their children.”

For our new president’s responses to questions about where gender fits within intersectionality within Unitarian Universalism; how she sees the UUA currently addressing issues surrounding women and girls and her leadership around them; the role of our movement in the future of trans women’s rights and safety, especially trans women of color; and how the UUA and UU congregations can improve the health and lives of women they employ; and more, see the entire interview on our [website](#).

July 7, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## The Status Quo is Not Fair



Guest Blogger Becca Miller

Many of us have spent the past 100+ days grappling with our priorities in the strange new country revealed to us in November. Though of course this is not truly a brave new world — for many of our sisters November was not a dramatic reveal so much as a sickening confirmation of truths they have known in their bones and in their experiences nearly every day of their lives. They did their best to warn us, and we failed to hear.

On the religious left, we are confronting the reality of how the values of social and racial justice that we easily claim in Saturday afternoon marches and Sunday morning sermons play out in our daily lives. On the political left, recent dust-ups within the Democratic party have revived the ongoing discussion over the place of reproductive rights within the progressive movement. Are they a social wedge that distracts us from the critical need to address skyrocketing inequality and the outsize — indeed, obscene — influence of money on our political system? Or is reproductive justice too integral a part of any progressive social movement to be left behind in order to win voters who would otherwise be swayed by economic arguments? We are learning difficult lessons, and I believe that once again we fail to listen to our sisters at our own peril.

Our values call us to social justice and, as Unitarians, we pray with our feet and with our service. For me, this means never forgetting that our service must be with and to those at the margins. And it means that to work for true social justice we must not forget that for many of us the intersections of those margins can be a truly dangerous — and often lonely — place. For those of us who identify as both women and economic progressives, the intersection of those margins is painfully clear: There can be no economic justice without reproductive justice. The latter is not a distraction, it is a crucial stepping stone.

For those of us who can become pregnant, consistent access to affordable birth control is perhaps one of the single most important factors to support our careers and education. Winning the fight for a livable wage throughout our country will mean nothing if we cannot access those jobs because we are pinned to childbirth and childcare we do not want.

For those of us who do become pregnant, the choice of whether to continue a pregnancy is colored by many factors, but to imagine that economics are not among them smacks of privilege: in the United States, the current cost of raising a child is nearly a quarter of a million dollars and the government offers precious little in the way of financial or legal support to help us shoulder those burdens. Telling a woman that she must give birth to a child she cannot afford is not a social frivolity, it is an economic policy.

When we do choose to have children, our workplaces often penalize us with lost wages and lower salaries. If we are in a heterosexual partnership with a man, we often make less than our partners and work in lower prestige careers because our society consistently devalues jobs that are coded as ‘women’s work.’ In California, where I live, the annual cost of childcare for an infant is nearly \$12,000: 20% of an average family’s income and out of reach for over two-thirds of the families in

our state. And so, because we make less and our jobs are less ‘important,’ it is women who systematically leave our jobs to care for our children.

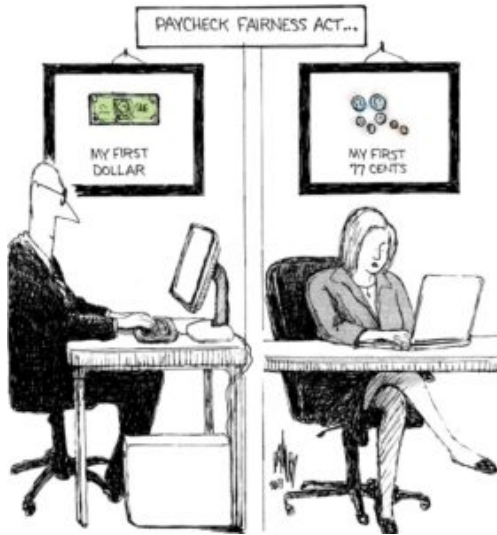
These issues, of course, are magnified for women of color whose lives are marginalized not only by economic and gender disparity, but by a system of white supremacy designed to help those of us who are white at the expense of our sisters of color. We cannot truly address economic justice if we ignore the intersections of these margins: [Over 90% of health aides and childcare workers are women, and the majority in both occupations are women of color](#). While childcare is prohibitively expensive for many families, it is simultaneously radically undervalued. [In 2016 the average hourly wage for childcare workers was \\$10.18 per hour](#). Many of us who are white and economically privileged are only able to afford care for our children and families because the wages we pay do not fairly value the work that women of color are doing to keep us in careers we love.

The call for a moral revival of the religious and the call for social revolution from political progressives come at the same time because we all recognize that something has gone deeply wrong in our society. We live in a country of rampant inequality, and in our hearts we know a basic truth: The status quo is not fair. It is not just. It requires a change. But no revolution that requires the sacrifice of our bodily autonomy for the sake of false economic justice will succeed, nor is it a revolution of which I want any part.

*Rebecca Fielding-Miller is a public health social scientist who conducts research on the social drivers of HIV and gender based violence at the University of California, San Diego. She is also an elected assembly district delegate to the California Democratic party convention and a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego. Her work can be found at [www.RebeccaFieldingMiller.com](http://www.RebeccaFieldingMiller.com)*

May 10, 2017 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)

## [Paychecks and Protections Get Less Fair](#)



As UUs, we rightly focused inward last week (and moving forward) on our own associational practices of inequity and grievous lack of parity. At the same time, Trump is – in the words of Associated Press reporter Darlene Superville – steadily plugging away at a major piece of his agenda: undoing Obama and the progressive policies and reforms he put in place during his presidency.

Yesterday was [Equal Pay Day](#) – the day that marks how far into 2017 women employed full time, year-round in the U.S. have to work in order to catch up with what men were paid in 2016. At the start of April, sometimes also called the cruelest month, please pay attention to a cruel move Trump made on March 27 when he revoked the [2014 Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Order](#), which

ensured that companies with federal contracts comply with 14 labor and civil rights laws and which also rolled back protections and actions against contractors who were found guilty of wage discrimination and sexual harassment.

Trump's overturn – done with little notice – has eliminated the requirement put in place through an executive order by President Obama that companies with federal contracts be transparent in providing evidence that there was no gender discrimination in pay. The Order also banned forced arbitration clauses for claims of sexual harassment, sexual assault or discrimination. These protections are now gone.

While there is still a significant overall gap between the rate of pay for white women and white men (75% according to 2016 stats), for Hispanic or Latina (54%), Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, American Indian, and Alaska Native women (58%) and African American women (63%) the gap is much higher. With gratitude to persistent leaders inside and outside Congress, yesterday an effort was made to bring back for reconsideration a bill that has been in the queue for passage since 1997.

In the words of Debra Ness, CEO of the National Partnership for Work and Family, “It is encouraging that champions for women and working families in Congress are reintroducing the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#) on Equal Pay Day. The day is always a painful reminder that the gender wage gap persists in all corners of the country, and that it has damaging consequences that ripple throughout our workplaces, families, communities and the economy.”

Ness explains that the Paycheck Fairness Act would combat the pay discrimination that contributes to the wage gap. Specifically, it would prohibit employers from retaliating against workers for discussing their wages and limit the use of applicants' salary history in the hiring process. It would also recognize employers with good pay practices, provide assistance to small businesses that need help adopting strong policies, create a negotiation skills training program, and enhance federal agencies' ability to investigate and enforce pay discrimination laws.

## 34 Cents Resistance



A few shockingly raw chilly evenings ago, after our false spring, a small group of women in my town gathered after work at a local gastropub to hoist a few and to write postcards. Some of them were pre-made from the Women's March, others picked out of personal stashes. Official USPS cards are 34 cents. Others require a 47 cent first class stamp.

By all accounts, despite the ill weather and despite their exhaustion, the women who came had a great time, both because of their socialization with

others of the same general age and life situations, and because at the end of their time together they had produced an impressive pile of protest: messages to policy makers. A scene of determination and resistance.

According to their [Facebook page](#), organizers of a postcard blitz today (March 15) are urging Americans who oppose the policies of President Donald Trump to make their objections known by flooding the White House with postcards. In an event dubbed the “Ides of Trump,” organizers hope to see **delivery of a million or more cards indicating disapproval of Trump and his agenda** to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The name is a twist on the expression “Ides of March,” which most people probably know from its use in the Shakespeare play *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in which a soothsayer ominously [warns](#) the doomed title character to “beware the Ides of March.”

While our Unitarian Universalist Association offices in Boston are closed due to blizzard conditions today, they have sent out a Facebook post predicting a “blizzard” of cards written, as *The Boston Globe* reports, “in quiet coffee shops, bookstores, and Unitarian Universalist churches... armed with the antiquated tools of an emerging resistance: markers, cards and postage stamps.”

As the minister affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF), I am charged with mobilizing our members and large social media following (2,000+ on our [email list](#) and 1,500 on our [Facebook page](#)) to act on behalf of justice and equity for women and girls. So my personal card — or cards — to our 45<sup>th</sup> president will call him to account for the horrendous choices he made when he selected cabinet members, and for some of his early executive orders and policy initiatives. I will write that his pronouncements and actions in this arena alone are grounds for dismissal.

I will tell him that, under Attorney General Jeff Sessions — an intractable abortion opponent — the Justice Department is unlikely to defend reproductive rights, from contraceptive coverage under federal insurance plans to clinics asking for action against law-breaking protesters. I will tell him that Tom Price, now his Secretary of Health and Human Services, is also virulently anti-choice, that he will actively oppose a birth control provision under insurance plans, and that he refused to disavow

a fellow legislator in Georgia (when he served in that state's general assembly) when he said publicly that a raped woman could not get pregnant.

Or a more succinct version thereof.

On another card, I will list out just some of the ways that the just released Republican plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act will harm women and their families:

- The bill specifically blocks people with Medicaid coverage from accessing preventive health care at Planned Parenthood health centers, including birth control, cancer screenings, and STD testing and treatment.
- The bill seeks to eliminate private insurance coverage of abortion by prohibiting financial assistance (tax credits) to be used to purchase a plan that covers abortion beyond life-endangerment, rape, and incest.
- It prevents new states from expanding Medicaid starting in 2020 and implements an enrollment freeze that will drastically undermine Medicaid coverage;
- It slashes funding for the Medicaid program, which low-income women and people of color disproportionately rely on for health care. And it ends in 2020, for the Medicaid Expansion population, the Essential Health Benefits requirement which requires most plans to cover basic health care, including maternity and newborn care.

Which in itself is enough to call for firing for gross discrimination and cruelty.

These are the issues that move me to write the President today. The postcard campaign encourages us to choose our own concerns and passions, hand-write them, and send them to:

Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, DC. 20500

If you are so moved, include #idesoftrump on your card. You are advised not to include your return address. It is not necessary.

March 15, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Getting Harder to be a Woman



With the 2017 International Women's Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women and People of Progressive Faiths coming up this weekend (Feb.16-18) in Asilomar, CA, the release of a [new study](#) on the Global Gender Gap from the World Economic Forum provides a timely and sobering backdrop.

As *Washington Post* reporter Amanda Erickson wrote in her [summary article](#) this past week: "It's getting harder to be a woman."

The annual international report looks at women's standing in 142 countries, and bases its conclusions on four indexes: educational attainment, health, political empowerment and economic participation. Overall, if these statuses continue at their current rate, the study authors say, it will take another 170 years to reach gender equity, with one "bright" exception: access to education. Currently, men and female-identified women are going to school at about the same rate. And women's health outcomes in general parallel men's.

But other critical measures like political and economic participation are lagging. While more women than ever are working, we are falling behind because the burden of household chores and caregiving still falls overwhelmingly on us. The study notes that the gap between paid and unpaid work starts early, with girls worldwide spending around 30 percent of their time doing uncompensated labor, reducing the time and ability to earn as much money as men.

"Female-driven fields," the authors tell us, tend to pay less than work dominated by men.

While we are still almost two centuries away from global parity for women and men, the World Economic Forum report indicates that, in some parts of the world, the gender gap is shrinking much faster. South Asia is set to close the gap in 46 years and Europe in 61 years, and Latin America in 71 years. Central and North America are making the least progress in catching up. In terms of ranking, out of 142 countries the U.S. ranks 45<sup>th</sup>, with poor showings in our political positions and flattening of improvement in numbers of women in the workplace due to lack of accessible and available childcare and spotty family leave.

In Africa, Rwanda has sustained progress. It is the one country in the world where more women than men hold elected office.

The January 2017 special edition of *National Geographic* on "[The Gender Revolution](#)" focused on the shifting landscape of gender, and explored definitions of and stories about gender through the lenses of science and culture across a spectrum of gender identity. It looked at what determines the paths to womanhood and manhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of social roles. The magazine also presented baseline statistics on education and protection of equal opportunities for the world's 1.2 billion girls, using data from UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and other sources. Again, the headline and the conclusion was that it is still difficult to be female. Suicide is the leading cause of death for girls 10-19 globally; 700 million women and girls are married as child

brides before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, with significant risk of domestic violence and higher maternal mortality; 120 million girls worldwide are forced into intercourse and other sexual acts. Girls and women who have endured such abuse, the article notes, are at higher risk of exploitation in the sex trade.

As UU women gather in convocations or small groups or across the Internet, there is much left to do to make more urgent progress in rescuing girls and women from danger. And at the same time to recognize and celebrate gender fluidity and a future, as one writer put it, where gender is neither an advantage nor an impediment.

February 15, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [gender](#), [gender gap](#), [gender justice](#)



## Covering a Movement



Near the top of my list of must do errands this past weekend was a stop at the national chain bookstore where I was reasonably certain I could pick up a copy of *Time* magazine. I was looking forward to owning the issue with a single pink pussy hat on the front cover, and the headline: “The Resistance Rises: How a March Become a Movement.” A movement is what I hoped would happen as a result of both the conscientious organization and overflowing spontaneity that went into the DC gathering (not really a march, it turned out, due to the massive crowd) and the other marches – big and small – all over the country and the world. My perhaps overly optimistic expectation was that we would not just march for a few hours but mobilize for as long as it is going to take to overcome: the 60,000 people, including my husband, who turned out for the one in Atlanta which started at the entrance of the Civil and Human Rights Center; the 150,000 people, including my daughter-in-law and three year

old granddaughter, in Boston; the 25,000 people, including my daughter, in San Jose, one of three in the San Francisco Bay area. The small but courageous coterie of ex pats in Singapore, including my oldest son. The several million who showed up.

The Women’s March has quickly evolved from being just a single January Saturday event. The evidence is mounting. I saw it in the actual physical signs of continuing activism: the pussy-hat wearing protesters at airports, in front of the White House, and at other public places in response to the ban on Muslims entering this country and the welcoming of Syrian refugees. In the many specific appeals each day on social media in the name of the march to call, write, and in other ways resist the seemingly endless list of assaults on human rights in this infant administration. It can be seen in the loud and persistent objections to the ludicrous, reactionary cabinet nominations being rushed through with minimum vetting.

It turn out that I will have to wait for the *Time* documentation of all that is already happening. The March issue not is on the newsstands until February 8. And I will be there to grab one for herstory.

This was not the first time in recent weeks that I wanted to get hold of an actual print copy of a mainstream magazine for posterity. While others ventured out in the days after Christmas to take advantage of sales, I went in search of the January *National Geographic* for its special issue on the shifting landscape of gender. Like the *Time* cover featuring the pussy hat, the *National Geographic* general (vs. subscriber) cover was also previewed ahead of the publication date: a group portrait of transgender, bi-gender, intersex, and androgynous people along with a cisgender male.

The note from editor-in-chief Susan Goldberg on this topic – which was researched for more than two years – suggests the approach the content inside the covers. “All of us carry labels applied by others,” she wrote. “The most enduring label, and arguably the most influential, is the one most of us got. It’s a boy or it’s a girl. Today that, and other, beliefs about gender are shifting rapidly and radically.”

Inside the magazine there is a general overview of gender today, with the most current definitions; a piece on helping families talk about gender; profiles of nine-year-olds and how gender affects their lives; an essay on how science helps us rethink gender; and another on some of the dangers that still surround identified genders.

The actual design of the cover and the philosophical/ethical design of the coverage of gender in 2017 has not gone without pushback and critique from *National Geographic's* readers, much of which has been thoughtfully addressed by the editors. Questions like why there are no cisgender females in the cover photo? (Many are featured inside.) Why was the focus on children? (Because they are keen and articulate observers who are candid in reflecting our world back at us.) Why was intersex called a disorder? (References to disorder were removed from online editions and the definition was corrected.)

On Feb. 9, the National Geographic Channel will air a two-hour program on “The Gender Revolution.” It will be hosted by Katie Couric, who had been called out as being insensitive three years ago during an interview with two transgender women – Carmen Carrera and Laverne Cox. For the upcoming special, Couric interviewed scientists, activists, and families, with an emphasis on personal stories.

Look for a blog review next week of both the television special and the print issue.

January 30, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [election](#), [gender](#), [gender justice](#), [pussy hat](#), [unitarian](#), [uuwf](#), [women](#)

## All Set?



### **UUWF members march on Washington in 1963**

In April 1989, my then-14-year-old daughter, 65-year-old mother, and I flew from California to Washington, DC for the National Organization for Women's March for Women's Lives. I remember camping out with my sister-in-law and elderly aunt in my youngest brother's finished basement in Takoma Park, MD. Only a couple of us had beds. The rest slept in borrowed sleeping bags on the carpeted floor.

I remember it was colder that April than I had expected. It always seemed colder in our nation's capital than back home. I remember marching in slow motion, looking for restrooms, looking for pay phone booths. It was not, however, my first such large-scale march, coming from a liberal, religious Unitarian, and

political family where going on a march (civil rights, anti-nuclear weapons, anti-Vietnam War) was nearly as common an activity as miniature golf or San Francisco Giants games. So I had been on quite a few justice and peace demonstrations before – though none as large, some half a million people – and there would be quite a few after: marches opposing other wars, annual Pride marches and parades.

But I have not chosen to go on other DC women's pro-choice or other rights marches. Not until this coming Saturday, January 21, 2017. It was only a few days after the presidential election when I decided to attend what is simply called the Women's March. I could not miss a chance to be in solidarity with – and feel the strength of – other women and their allies who were stunned as I was by the election outcome and scared for the future of reproductive justice and other human rights of women.

As a minister with the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF), this time I am flying in alone from Atlanta and meeting up with two friends. Fortunately, we have been warmly welcomed by my ministerial colleague Rev. Debra Haffner, the newly installed parish minister at the UU church in Reston, VA, to join her and a group of her congregants on the bus Saturday and at a potluck gathering the night before. So I will not be separated from my UU peeps.

As the former president of the Religious Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a multi-faith perspective on matters of human sexuality, she is a veteran marcher and organizer. Before the meal, she will be doing a training on what to expect as we join in the crowds walking the less-than-two-mile route to the White House, as will be other UU ministerial colleagues and lay leaders for groups on their way to DC. And of course groups that will be part of some 600 sister marches in all 50 states and around the world.

Rev. Kathy Schmitz, senior minister of the First Unitarian Church of Orlando, FL, traveled to DC for the same 1989 March for Women's Lives as I did, so she is no stranger to the preparations or the

experience. Her interest in holding one or more pre-march orientations was perked when she began seeing posts specifically about training aimed at ways to deal with potential counter-protestors, heckling, and other disruptive incidents. She had experienced being taunted herself while on a demonstration against the Iraq War. She knew there are resources particular to the UU, including a de-escalation video produced by Standing on the Side of Love.

She wanted a time to go over the most current information about the bus trip and the march itself, and she wanted also to build community by having a time to share whether people had been on marches before. If so, to hear their perspectives, expectations, and concerns. She wanted also to engage in a conversation about the societal location of those going on the march – about race, class and privilege.

There were over 30 participants for the bus-specific gatherings and over 50 for an open meeting last Sunday. About half of the total attendees were not members of the congregation and, among those going on marches, it was about evenly split between those traveling to DC and those headed to the Women's Rally in Central Florida.

Surprises for Rev. Schmitz? That many had never been on a march or a rally before, and that many had not heard about the leadership controversies that went on in the early weeks of march planning. Heated discussions were held around a lack of diversity and the need for intersectionality of justice oppressions in the agenda, partners and speakers.

As a representative of one of the now-hundreds of partner organizations sponsoring the March for Women's Lives, I was so impressed by the last call this week when the logistical details were shared and the attention to the needs of disabled persons – including those who will be rolling or scooting instead of walking, and those who will need sound amplification. The coordination of route limitations and navigating all the permits required, especially during an inaugural weekend, was amazing.

In this viral social media age, information sharing about bathrooms, places to warm up, and cellphone charging stations have been spread with lightning speed. But most of all I have been beyond impressed by the thoughtful, deep, and eloquent work that has gone into the heart of this Women's March: its guiding vision and unifying principles.

Starting with the “basic and original tenet from which all our values stem... We believe that Women's Rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are Women's Rights.”

Not one of us should leave our homes and join in the marches without taking these words to heart and grounding ourselves in the premise that “Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice.”

Safe journeys all.

*[share your photos on social media using the hashtag [#uwwomenmarch](#)]*

January 20, 2017 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## What I'm Doing



By Claire Sexton  
UUWF Vice President/Funding Programs

I awoke on November 9 as if from a bad dream, my young son had made a mess that I wasn't ready to deal with, and I'd stayed up late the night before trying to comprehend what was going on.

The nightmare has deepened as time goes by. Things that have helped me include SNL that week; I'm a big fan of Dave Chappelle and was so happy to see him back in the public eye. I played the cold open — Kate McKinnon dressed as Hilary and playing Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah on loop — for a few days, trying to get "Sister Suffragette" from Mary Poppins out of my head.

Since then I've made a document with all my legislators' phone numbers for their DC/Austin and home offices, and called most of them about one piece of legislation or another. I did Paul Ryan's survey about whether I support the ACA and left a detailed message about how I (a freelancer) and my husband (a student) would not have insurance if it were not for the ACA. That my husband was able to have surgery this summer only because of our subsidized plan. That only our young son would be covered by Medicaid if it were not for the ACA.

Since moving back to Texas, I've gotten to know my Texas rep a bit as he is a supporter of the arts and has been on hand to talk about arts advocacy. So I didn't hesitate to call his office the week before Thanksgiving and talk about a law that has been pre-filed in the Texas House of Representatives, which requires hospitals to cremate or inter fetal tissue from miscarriages or abortions. I told the staffer how I thought it was an onerous thing to make people in overtaxed hospitals do, as well as for the woman (from whose body the fetal tissue came) in what is surely a difficult time of life.

She was super helpful, making sure I knew it was early to be registering opinions and that Doc Anderson usually does vote *for* "those kinds of things." She shared that the Rep who introduced it was a bit of a surprise but that he's a committee chair so it may have more legs this time around.

Yesterday, I learned that a version of this rule is definitely going to be enacted, although through some other process. I first heard via a Texas friend posting an article, and now it's making the rounds among my pro-choice friends who are in other places. TERRIBLE. Will be doing more calling about that soon.

Another thing that helps is that I have a great family that lifts me up; I'm so thankful for them. My husband, young son, and I traveled to southeast Louisiana to meet up with my mom's side of the family. That my grandfather couldn't make it was a bit of a disappointment, but that did make it a much easier trip. That side of the family, with Grandad as the exception, is on the liberal end of the political spectrum. There wasn't much talk of the president-elect over the holiday weekend, and when he came up in discussion we commiserated on our disappointment and moved on quickly. It

was such a pleasure to be in the warm embrace of the family just then, and have an unspoken agreement that Ivanka's dad was not worth our precious time together.

The group has never done a Thanksgiving together before. We'd had a couple Christmases and lots of summertime river trips. I have mixed feelings about the holiday, and it's sure not cheap or easy to travel around that time, but as I posted early on that Thursday morning:

In Louisiana where we met up with the majority of my mom's side of the family, from Florida, Georgia, California, and other parts of Texas. I am immensely grateful to be with all of them. Charlie got to play all evening with his second cousin Cliff, then he crashed out with his other second cousin Olivia. We've got a Turducken ready to go in the oven and I'm sitting on a porch overlooking a foggy bayou watching the birds while everyone else sleeps. All is not right with the world, but my little world right now is pretty A-OK.

I'm back home in the "real world" again and it still feels surreal. Things have changed even since then. More disappointing news about cabinet appointees. Learning that a big group of veterans is arriving or on their way to stand with Standing Rock and be protectors of the water protectors, including a fond friend from high school. End-of-year fundraising appeals everywhere I turn, all for organizations I love but can't afford to support on a nonprofit freelancer's "salary."

The list is long, and I keep adding items, checking them off slowly, and moving to the next thing I can do. I'm so glad to be a part of the UUWF Board. Knowing some of the members for only a few months and meeting them in person for the first time just this past October, and knowing others since I was a teenager. Being with the group is another kind of warm embrace. In person or in spirit or email — our discussions are inspiring, talking about how to best support women, how best to fight institutional, intersectional oppressions in the U.S. (and, let's face it, in our Unitarian Universalist communities). I want to strengthen women and remind them, remind you, that it's OK to be vulnerable and flawed too.

December 2, 2016 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)



## Abnormal as Normal



### **Julie Taylor, president of the UU Trauma Response Ministry**

The night of the 2016 presidential election the results came in slowly, and for so many of us, shockingly. I excused myself from a small gathering and went home to bed, leaving it to my husband to keep watching—letting me know when the results were horribly clear. After that, and for days after, I slept very little; some nights not much at all.

The next morning I drove 50 miles to the monthly meeting of UU religious professionals, where I had been previously scheduled to lead a conversation of our post-election opportunities to bring our purposes and principles, our faith values, into intersectional public witness work.

Values like inherent worth and dignity, justice and compassion, the right of conscience, the democratic process. Not unexpectedly, it was a somber gathering with more than a few tears and flashes of righteous anger.

That Thursday—only two days after the election—I participated in a [Sistersong](#) webinar that had been set up a few weeks earlier. Women of color (plus myself as a white ally) in leadership around reproductive justice could share their initial responses to the prospect of a presidency of a candidate who had built much of his campaign around anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-choice rhetoric. Whose voting record on public policy is zero. On the call, tuned into by hundreds of justice advocates and concerned citizens, these women expressed deep concern and fear about the safety of LGBTQ people, immigrants, communities of color, low income people. Decimation of the Affordable Care Act. Imprisonment. Deportation.

That next Sunday, like hundreds of UU clergy, I led worship in a congregation where most, if not all, of the congregants were stunned and raw, and again fearful. And where words seemed incredibly insufficient.

Then and only then I collapsed; giving into what trauma specialists call extreme distress, what Holocaust survivor and therapist Viktor Frankl described as, “An abnormal response to an abnormal situation... which is normal.” I still sleep poorly, am generally exhausted, irritable, my stomach hurts all the time.

Julie Taylor, president of the UU Trauma Response Ministry, has put together a most instructive and reassuring [video](#) that is very applicable for managing post-election stress response. In it, she reminds us that beyond ordinary stress, distress in the face of what happened November 8th is normal. It will take time, perhaps several weeks, to individually stabilize, to bounce back—or ahead—from the very real physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual reactions to such a disquieting and disorienting event. We need to find at least a couple of specific ways to stay grounded, which will be different for each of us.

Like remembering to eat well. Like finding places and times of quiet. Like intentionally connecting with people who can listen to us and hold us accountable for unflagging self-care. As time passes, we will need to add a few more strategies for centering, for energizing, for replenishing. And then

more still. It will perhaps seem self-indulgent, counter-productive, maybe even wrong. But it is essential if our call is to emphatically, collectively resist dangerous and unhealthy acts and to remain resilient for the challenges ahead—some known and many as yet unknown.

November 23, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [election](#), [healing](#), [new normal](#), [stress](#), [trauma](#)

## What's Your Plan?



I live in a county in a state where early voting opened October 17<sup>th</sup> in one location, and in multiple locations after Halloween. So I took advantage of casting my ballot the first day. I stood in a longish line with a diverse group of eligible adults, reflecting the changing racial and age demographics of my Southern metro area.

As soon as I finished voting, got my “I Voted” sticker, turned out of the parking lot of the building where we usually come to register cars in person, pay fines, or dispute water bills — I felt relieved. I had followed this presidential election nonstop for over a year, riveted to cable news political shows every evening and many Sunday mornings when I wasn’t preaching. I was experiencing much the same responses as when I watch hurricane and other natural disaster coverage nonstop over a period of days. I was overwrought, exhausted.

So I went (mostly) cold turkey on the election. I began streaming *West Wing* episodes as a television antidote for the current American state of affairs, along with the pilot for a new Amazon series called *Good Girls Revolt*, a retro look at some of the pioneering women in newsrooms.

And then I began to hear about efforts to suppress voting, deliberate and perhaps not, including a local story about a mother of three who was told to leave because her toddler was having a meltdown. I wondered if there were still ways I could ensure that she and others could weigh in. Because there is much at stake in this year’s races and ballot initiatives, including for women in particular.

Affordable and comprehensive health care is at stake, reproductive and general. Access to safe, legal abortion and to birth control is at stake. Equal wages are at stake. Workplace non-discrimination and prohibition of sexual harassment are at stake. The integrity of immigrant and refugee families is at stake, with women and children at risk for involuntary separation. Safe and sensible gun control is at stake — an estimated 46 percent fewer women will be shot by an intimate partner if background checks are strengthened and it becomes harder to buy a handgun.

So many reasons to vote, and zero reason to deny this right to the women of this country.

There is so much potential power in voter turnout by women. According to the Center for American Women in Politics (2011), in every presidential election since 1980 the proportion of eligible female voters who voted exceeded the proportion of eligible male adults who voted. Women have cast between four and seven million more votes than men in recent elections.

So I am exploring a way to offer child care to the mothers and grandmothers and other caregivers in my town who need time without distraction or harassment to go to the polls. I am considering showing up Tuesday Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> to be a calming clergy presence. And I have posted on my personal Facebook page a simple but powerful question: What is your plan for voting?

Dozens of my FB friends have responded by letting me know they have already voted early, or by absentee ballot, or have a definite time they will go to vote on Election Day. We are holding each other accountable and, if we need help, asking for what we need to make it happen.

What is your plan?

November 4, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [election](#), [vote](#), [vote plan](#), [voter plan](#), [women](#)

## What's At Stake for Women (Part 2)



A recent self-care Monday, during which I had all my moles and skin tags and dark spots checked out and this year's flu shot injected, led to another preventive discovery. In the clinic waiting room, I came across the September 26, 2016 issue of *Women's Health* magazine, chock full of the usual advice on how to deal with foot pain, master the podium for public speaking, and choose the latest shades of make-up (as well as an intro to eating paleo). Plus a well-timed article, put together by journalists and policy experts in the arena of women's health and wellness, exploring "what if?"

the most dramatic gender-related proposals that have been put forth by candidates this election cycle actually came to pass. How might this figure in the choices women voters will make on or before Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>?

Last week's blog laid out the consequences of completely repealing the Affordable Care Act or of declaring abortion to be illegal. There would be huge costs in terms of sicker women and dangerously unregulated medical procedures. This week let's take a look, based on the opinions of dozens of experts who were interviewed, at what is at stake for women around immigration. Again, if the most extreme proposed measures were adopted, the financial and human costs would be high and the damages great.

If the federal government followed through on deporting even half of the undocumented immigrants in this country, ***some five million women would be forced to leave***. Many of these women would be separated from their children, since 88 percent of the kids in immigrant families are U.S. born citizens. The cost in emotional upheaval would be unfathomable.

The median household earnings of citizen wives and children — left behind to make it alone after their spouses and fathers were deported — would fall by half, to less than \$25,000 a year. Estimates are that this drastic reduction in income would "shave an average of 2.2 years off these women's lives."

The UU Women's Federation has participated in work for common sense immigration reform. We do this work, along with dozens of other faith and secular groups, with a commitment to protecting rather than breaking up immigrant families, ensuring due process, and promoting immigration policies that empower women. We urge you to go to the polls with this intention.

*Next Week: The Power of Women in Presidential Elections.*

October 27, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [immigration](#), [unitarian](#), [uufw](#), [women](#)

## What If?



Last week I scheduled two of my fall preventive health appointments: an all over skin cancer checkup and a flu shot. While I was stripped down to a thin blue paper cover-up, awaiting the dermatologist, I decided to skim through whatever magazine was lying around the exam room.

Given the choice between thumbing through “Seventeen” and the September issue of “Women’s Health,” I chose the latter, figuring that I could waste a few idle ( and nearly naked ) moments,

reading up yet again about how to achieve sexy abs, drop a size, sleep well, and slay stress. Instead, I came across a well-researched, thoughtful article titled “What If...” an investigative piece on what is at stake for women on November 9th, the end of this long Presidential election season. It was researched and then written by four journalists, experts, we are told, in health care, abortion, immigration and gun control. They were asked to answer the question: *Based on past research and the experience of other countries, what would be the possible consequences of the choices we make in the voting booth?*

The facts about policies under fire and at risk were provided by 32 thought leaders from schools of public health, think tanks, foundations, and other institutions.

I confess that when my visit was over and I was left to get dressed, the magazine left the cubicle along with me (and a prescription for face cream). There was too much relevant and sometimes surprising information crammed in that issue for me to read and digest in the short time I waited for my health care provider. I knew I wanted to share it in this blog.

In the healthcare arena, if the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was repealed: women could pay one and a half times as much as men in health insurance premiums. Prior to ACA, insurers were allowed to charge women more, a collective \$1 billion more than men per year.

48 million women might not be able to afford birth control, since the ACA currently covers 18 forms of contraception, saving women around \$1.4 billion annually.

Before the ACA, just 12 percent of individual market plans included maternity benefits. Prenatal care and delivery would not automatically be covered by insurers, or breast feeding pumps or lactation support programs.

More women could develop cervical cancer should the ACA be repealed or greatly altered. An estimated 55 million women would lose free access to Pap smears.

And if the ACA goes away, 15 million low income women, will no longer have health care coverage at all.



What if abortion was once again completely illegal? Based on data from other countries like Chile where abortion is banned, women would attempt to end unwanted pregnancies on their own, or have unsafe illegal procedures. Some of the one million women who miscarry each year might be jailed (in Chile, 113 women were investigated in 2014 and 27 found guilty).

And if restrictions were lifted – such as waiting periods — based again on evidence from countries like Switzerland and Canada where access is less restricted, there will be fewer abortions, earlier abortions, and women's lives would be saved from mortally risky pregnancies and deliveries.

**Next week:** What if “the wall” were really built between Mexico and the United States, and there were new efforts to aggressively deport undocumented immigrants? How would this impact these women and their families?

October 21, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [abortion](#), [birth control](#), [Blog](#), [healthcare](#), [women](#)

## Missing from the Presidential Debate, Missing from the National Conversation



I had, obviously mistakenly, anticipated that the 2016 election season would offer an opportunity, especially during the presidential primary and general election debates, to both name and dive deeply into public policy matters of consequence to women. Not just because of the presence of the first female nominated candidate by a major political party, but because of the enormous sway held by women voters in determining the winner of this contest.

I was therefore grateful to learn about the American Association of University Women's [issues bingo cards](#), and also to the National Partnership for Women and Families for their *We The Families* platform, intended to "make America more healthy, fair and family friendly," and demanding that women be treated "with dignity, fairness and respect." Armed with these thoughtful and clever tools, I had hoped to hear relevant and pointed gender-specific questions posed, either by the debate moderators or, during the most recent face-off in St. Louis, by the selected undecided town hall audience members.

Disappointingly, my bingo card of key words about women was practically empty following the first presidential debate a couple of weeks back. Sunday evening, I was looking once again to fill up my game card and score a win for at least some air time devoted to acknowledging the long overdue need for equal and fair pay, full reproductive justice, and workplaces free of discrimination and harassment. But once again my card came up nearly empty. The notable exception was a question from a private citizen posed toward the end of the 90-minute forum about the candidates' views on the qualities necessary in Supreme Court nominees. This led to a mention, at least, of *Roe v. Wade* and keeping abortion legal nationwide.

The entire debate was held in the context of fresh evidence of societal misogyny and rape culture, and in an atmosphere of abusive and bullying lurking and hulking, well beyond the mansplaining I had come to expect. But rather than a rote defense of (or professed love for) women, I fully expected that the grossly disturbing developments preceding the debate would rightfully have sparked more – not less – attention paid to the systemic ways in which women and girls are still treated as "less than." We don't need our public leaders to adore us or protect us. We need them to use their positions and power in the service of genuine and unconditional equity and justice.

**Noteworthy:** In response to national outrage over the six-month county jail sentence given to former Stanford University swimmer Brock Turner for a campus sexual assault of an unconscious woman, California has passed and signed into law two new laws requiring longer minimum sentences be served in state prison for this crime. The judge had used a provision for "extraordinary circumstances," in Turner's case – his youth and clean prior record – to impose a much shorter sentence than the six years that had been recommended by the prosecutor. Turner was released after only three months. Future convicted defendants may serve as many as 14 years.

October 10, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [clinton](#), [debate](#), [families](#), [trump](#), [women](#)



## No Bingo Win for First Presidential Debate



Just before the first Presidential Debate 2016 on Monday night, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) produced a bingo card to fill out over the 90-minute program. This is something they have done previously in advance of major public forums or policy addresses such as the State of the Union.

For this occasion, the center of the playing card was the word “women,” surrounded by key gender justice issues such as violence against women, harassment, the equal rights amendment, and campus sexual assault. The object, as in all bingo games, was to score by filling a line down, across, or vertically—the prize being the satisfaction of attention being paid to the concerns of women-identified voters and their allies.

What little attention was paid to any of these concerns happened in the first moments of the debate during the segment on prosperity. In this context one of the candidates mentioned, in cursory order: equal pay, affordable childcare, and family leave, with no follow up conversation or questions from the moderator. There were not enough squares filled in to come close to being able to call “bingo,” or to come away with any sense that other significant issues, like access to affordable birth control and abortion, received or will receive airtime at all. If so, this will follow the pattern of the primary debates for both major political parties.

Of course, the subjects that were covered matter to women, as women and as citizens: the overall economy, job creation, climate change, systemic racism, national security. But given the election-determining significance of the female vote, the lack of particular focus was more than noteworthy.

Following the debate—and ahead of the remaining scheduled ones, which will be more in the form of town meetings—the National Partnership for Women & Families issued an online poll. It asks whether the first presidential debate had addressed the issues that matter most to women and families, and which issues we would like to see discussed in greater detail at the next debate. Options include: economic and reproductive justice; high quality affordable health care; contraception and abortion care without barriers; quality maternity care; paid family and medical leave and paid sick leave; fair pay and a higher minimum wage; quality childcare; and an inclusive economy that lifts us all.

This survey, as well as their “We the Families” platform is available [online](#).

View the 2016 party platforms:

[Democratic Party](#)

[Republican Party](#)

[Libertarian Party Platform](#)

[Green Party Platform](#)

September 27, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [bingo](#), [Blog](#), [debate](#), [women](#)

## Remembering the Rosies



A story first posted last week on [People.com](http://People.com), shared at last count by more than 58,000 readers, reported the rediscovery after seven decades of the real life inspiration of what the article called the “iconic” Rosie the Riveter poster. The image of a muscular female factory worker, blue-shirted, with a red bandana covering her permed hair, captured a whole cohort of women who entered the work force and took on traditional men’s jobs during World War II, especially in the defense industry and other essential trades.

Naomi Parker-Fraley, now 95, was attending a reunion in 2009 at the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Park when she spotted a photo of the real woman behind the poster, captioned with the name of Geraldine Hoff Doyle. Parker-Fraley was horrified by this, having witnessed what was a case of mis-identity. When the poster was printed and featured in newspapers and magazines nationwide in 1942, Naomi had had been feted as the turret lathe operator whose photo was used to create this symbol, a stand-in for the three-million-plus additional women who had broken through the industrial job barriers at a time of great need.

This latest People story was about correcting the record for all time, naming Parker-Fraley as the original poster model indeed, and restoring her personal history and dignity.

Touted as patriotic heroines during those battle years, almost immediately following victory by the allied forces and the return of thousands of soldiers seeking to regain or locate jobs these same Rosie the Riveter women were sent home, shrinking the overall percentage of American women working to only a little more than a quarter of the entire adult female population.

Really sent home. Home presumably to housekeep in those cookie cutter suburban developments that mushroomed to fill a huge housing gap. Home to birth the three, four, and five children each that created what became the post-war Baby Boom.

This is the social milieu my mother came into at the beginning of her paid work life, after graduating college at the tail end of the war — admitted into a school that might not have been so welcoming to her had there not been so few remaining young male applicants. She had a bachelor’s degree in sociology, which translated for her only into low level and low paying office jobs, first with the Library of Congress and for a short while with the Red Cross, both considered only temporary positions until she found a husband and started her child rearing years.

Four children and 15 years later my mother longed for work again, this time more in keeping with her academic training and ambitions. In the early 1960s, this urge was not well-received by my father, who took it as an insulting affront to his male provider status. Her return to school to get an advanced degree, and her part-time and then full-time work, left her children to fend for themselves. This especially affected my youngest brother, who was five years old when she first walked out the domestic door. With no social supports, such as wrap around childcare, we were latchkey kids

before the term was coined. We rode our bikes down to the Lucky Store to buy quantities of raw chicken wings to bake and cheap chuck steaks and cheaper soda by the quart. We fought. We messed up the house and, as the only girl, I did the best I could to clean up behind us.

No matter my efforts at 11 or 12, the house was dusty, sour with the smell of bathroom mildew and neglected freezers. One of my potential friends, an aloof sixth grader named Laurie, with Dutch bangs and an upturned nose, visited once and reported on the dodgeball court that we had the messiest house she had ever seen. First, I wept with mortification and then spend the remaining eight years at home scrubbing baseboard grime, the piles of dirty dishes, and the dog hair on the stained beige carpet.

My mother just died at almost 93. In the past month, her remaining children have shared stories, some fond and many resentful, recalling that her youngest child — my brother Russ who passed away two years ago — resented her mightily for abandoning him to go to a job. He remembered that he was mostly left to trail after his otherwise occupied and sometimes cruel older siblings, and that chaos often reigned.

I find myself so much more forgiving of my mother now, when I think of the choices she had. And, more telling, of the dearth of practical backing for her decision to work outside the home. As ill luck would have it, she missed out on the brief and opportunistic (for the economy and war effort) Rosie the Riveter period, where of necessity there was some effort to make it possible for women with children to weld and rivet and engage in fields that had previously been off limits. To provide workplaces that sometimes, certainly not always, welcomed them and figured out ways for them to show up, be productive, and sustain their families.

Her desire — and need — to work, like so many other women then and now, was more thwarted than supported by a society that sent its Rosies back home with the message that they were on their own. How different is it really now?

September 16, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## End of Summer (feminist) Reads



In our neck of the American woods (as a famous network meteorologist is wont to say), it has been the hottest summer in at least 20 years, and dry to boot. The only consolation is that (1) my husband and I are off to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska for a week; (2) following this much anticipated and saved for vacation, I turn around for a long weekend at a high school reunion in Northern California, likely to be moderate, even cold in all that fog; and (3) school begins for the children in our town—and most of this Southern State—on

August 1st, so we can pretend that fall is on its way rapidly.

So while some of you might be midway through the season, fall is around the corner in lots of ways where I live. Families with children are returning from beaches and mountain cottages. Summer camps are winding down. The summer reading campaign held annually by our local library ends in less than two weeks. Open to adults as well as kids, it encourages a variety of literary experiences, from conventional bound to audio books. There is always a common read.

Which reminded me that I had the intention of finally wading into the stack of books I have ordered or picked up through the year, and specifically the nonfiction ones that might inform and enrich the ministry I do on behalf of women and girls (and their male allies). Or fiction written by women, about the lives of women. That's a mighty tall pile.

So I share these with you, in hopes of encouraging a lot of common reads, and possibly book review contributions we might post on our UUWF FB page, or website. Or others you might suggest as well:

### **Beach or Airplane Fiction**

*An Unseaworthy Mission* by Judith Campbell (Mainly Murder Press). The latest in a series of always entertaining, fast reading novels featuring Olympia Brown, a fictional minister, and her spouse Frederick. Penned by an actual UU parish and community minister.

*The Girls* by Emma Cline (Random House). This well-reviewed first novel traces the lives and fates of a group of young women, and their attraction to a cult which very much resembles the one spawned by the infamous Charles Manson—their vulnerability, strength and passion to belong.

### **A Nonfiction Crash Course in Contemporary Feminism**

*We Were Feminists Once*, by Andi Zeisler (PublicAffairs Books). In which the author takes on “marketplace” feminism, and in the process “breaks the pop culture time machine and makes you beg for more.” This is the book that the [New Prophetic Sisterhood](#) of UU woman-identified ministers are reading together.

*We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimanda Ngozi Adiche (Anchor Books). This tiny volume is actually the text of the personal essay by the same name which was a much lauded TED talk, in

which the author asks us to begin to dream about and plan for a different world, a fairer world, a world — as she writes — of happier men and women who are truer to themselves.

***Bad Feminist*** by Roxane Gay (Harper Perennial). An essay collection in which the novelist Roxane Gay talks about Scrabble, violence, fairy tales, race, longing and Hunger Games—for starters. Gay has been called a strikingly fresh cultural critic.

***Faithfully Feminists*** (White Cloud Press). Featuring the writings of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim feminists on why they stay in their original religious traditions. Described as a brave and powerful examination of observance and empowerment.

***Men Explain Things to Me*** by Rebecca Solnit (Haymarket Books). An updated essay collection by an eminent writer, historian and activist, whose work has been labeled funny, unflinchingly honest, and scathing in its conclusions.

Expect a report back from me, not unlike those book reports we did for our schools and our parents and other caregivers as proof we did not completely waste our summers. And that we might have learned something in the process of those hours under trees or covers with flashlights.

July 22, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Holding up the Mirror: Zika



My late father used to let mosquitoes feed on his arm. My brother remembers it was an uncharacteristically macho thing for our mild-mannered scientist parent to do. But, after all, he was a mosquito warrior, a microbiologist trained and ready to do battle with these insects that cause so much disease, misery, and death around the world.

As my father's daughter, I have—metaphorically—mosquito-borne viruses in my blood. The consciousness of inequities around who has access to prevention and treatment is also a part of my legacy from him. With a special sensitivity because of my professional ministry with the UU Women's Federation and also, more acutely, our recent UU statement of conscience to the intersection of race, class, and gender in reproductive rights and beyond to the full scope of reproductive justice. "Consciousness of inequity" is a term created by women of color in 1994 to, in their words, "center the experience of the most vulnerable... the inequality of opportunities they have to control their reproductive destiny."

So I began following the growing stream of reports out of Brazil last year about a disease called Zika that has frankly preoccupied me—despite and perhaps especially in this most difficult year for defending access to basic reproductive health services.

In the midst of all this there is the reappearance of a seemingly obscure disease, originally thought to be transmitted primarily by the bite of an infected *Aedes* species of, yes, mosquito. The disease was first discovered in 1974 in the Zika Forest in Uganda, Africa, and was cropping up in a growing number of countries south of our borders. Epidemic viruses are not new. We have had an Ebola scare and a West Nile disease incursion in recent years. What is new with Zika and it has taken a while to prove, is that this is the first known virus that causes a serious birth defect in a fetus — microcephaly — which may stunt a growing brain.

Never before, the director of the national Centers for Disease Control says, has a bite from a mosquito caused such a malformation. And it is now evident that Zika can be sexually transmitted as well.

Women who might be pregnant or are trying to become pregnant are told to avoid travel to affected countries. Women who live in some of those 61 countries and territories where the virus has already struck have been advised to delay pregnancies — continued pregnancies in any case — for up to two full years. For whom is that practical, even possible? How rich or poor might one have to be? How privileged or unprivileged? How oppressed or free?

Asking women to delay pregnancy without offering the necessary information, contraceptives, or access to abortion is a reproductive injustice. While contraceptives are legal in Brazil, access to them is difficult for women in poor, rural, and other marginalized communities. In other countries with Zika, such as El Salvador, birth control other than abstinence is prohibited. This is a reproductive injustice. There is little or no sexuality education in the schools, which would help teach about protection and pregnancy delay. This is a reproductive injustice. The onus for preventing pregnancy

is on women, while at least 30 percent of Latin American women report intimate partner sexual violence, including rape. This is a reproductive injustice.

In countries like Brazil, abortion is legal only in cases of maternal endangerment, raped and a handful of other situations—and is not legal in the case of carrying a fetus with neurological birth defects. Any other abortion is subject to imprisonment, while millions of women have them, often unsafely, anyway. Even while the United Nations – looking at the charter of human rights – has declared that, especially at this time, safe, legal, and available abortion is an international mandate. To not do so is a reproductive injustice.

If women bear children with serious medical problems, they are most often left to care for them alone for the rest of their lives. This too is a reproductive injustice.

As world citizens, these reproductive injustices in places outside our borders should call us to outrage and action. Beyond this, the situation for these millions of women in places like Brazil and El Salvador also hold up a mirror for this country as well if and when Zika sweeps through our gulf coast states as some have predicted. It will attack in places with the fewest resources and, like Brazil, with some of the harshest anti-choice laws. States like Florida, with the most confirmed cases of Zika so far. Alabama. Mississippi. Texas.

States that have passed among the most draconian laws regulating abortion and have attempted to shut down family planning centers. States where the rates of unintended pregnancy – failure to use effective means of birth control – are staggering. In Texas it is more than half. In Florida, 60 percent.

In our national climate the current House majority passed a long overdue Zika-fighting funding bill along with an amendment prohibiting use of any money for contraception – even condoms – and for the providers of birth control services, most explicitly Planned Parenthood. A national climate in which the House majority party has proposed once more to eliminate Title X – the national family planning program which provides low cost sexual health programs to more than four million patients and prevents more than a million unwanted pregnancies a year.

The reproductive justice statement of conscience we UUs adopted last year is deeply based in our Unitarian Universalist values of sacred sexuality, inherent worth and dignity, reverence for not only the value of life itself but also for the quality of life, the right of conscience, and justice and compassion in human relations. These values call us to support the black feminist principles that would fiercely protect individual human agency, trusting that every woman – all women – should be able to make important decisions about their bodies, their families, and communities without interference from those who would undermine the right to self-determination.

These principles should be upheld to protect whatever Zikas – whatever extraordinary or ordinary choices – we may be faced with.

*Click [here](#) to read a sermon on the Zika virus.*

July 14, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The Effect on Texas



By Daniel Kanter

A few weeks ago I was at my third PPFA national conference, representing Unitarian Universalism on the Clergy Advocacy Board. Our attempt to be the face of pro-reproductive rights and justice people of faith is an uphill climb. But we are a [small board with mighty diversity](#), representing everything from mainline Christianity to Sufism to Reform Judaism and beyond.

One concern we had, among many, was what would happen with the Texas laws to restrict access to abortion. As a clergyperson in Texas, today I can say that Texans breathe a little easier after the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of striking down the restrictions put on clinics performing abortions in Texas. About the same size as France, Texas attempted to reduce the number of clinics to a handful scattered around the state. It accomplished creating a negative financial impact that will take years to recover from. I can tell you that this was never about safety and always about ideological wars on women, communities of color, and the poor.

I see the issue up close every week. I organize a group of multi-faith volunteer chaplains to do pastoral care in a clinic in Dallas that performs abortions. The waiting room is always full. The women who come through are disproportionately women of color without access to standard health care that the more privileged of us take for granted. They also often have traveled a long way, some as far as Arkansas and Oklahoma. If they live in West Texas some will travel over 300 miles to then spend two or three days in the process the state has set up for them. To put this in context, if you were in Washington D.C. and had to travel the kinds of distances these women must, it would mean you would have to drive to Ohio or Hartford, Connecticut. The barriers are immense. They frequently talk about how misinformed they have been by schools and churches about their bodies, choices, and rights. And they talk about how, without a good friend or family member, they might have been in a situation that would cycle them further into poverty if they gave birth at that moment.

They also talk about feeling shame. Like most clinics in the country, we have our standard anti-abortion activists. Although, in Texas, some of them are dangerous and have even served time for violence (one known protestor even served time for trying to blow up his own church). Shame is dished out on the street corner and through their religious communities where they are seen as damned and sinful if they don't go to term. It is painful to hear the stories that point out the sad irony of a woman making a personal, private decision, the kind of action our faith upholds, and being attacked for exercising her moral agency, something she should be proud of. Many families are kept from the secret of these procedures because the real implications include excommunication from church and being kicked out onto the street. This is probably not so different than most places in the United States, but set in the context of a state that also tried to put restrictions on clinics, doctors, and institutions like Planned Parenthood, it feels lonelier and more difficult.

With the decision this week comes the long road back to opening clinics in remote towns and cities, recovering from undue burdens put on institutions that had to close in the interim, and finding ways

to serve so many who can now get basic examinations and help closer to home. There is still a lot of work to do to combat shame and restore dignity, to stand up to forces that are as large as denominations and as virulent as the protestors out on the corner, and to continue to fight to preserve constitutional rights that give all people decision-making power over their bodies.

And as a person of faith, I believe in a God of love that, without exception, holds us in an embrace of acceptance and seeks the work of mutuality, dignity, and justice in all frames of society. Okay, I'm taking a deep breath, wiping away some tears of joy, and heading out to celebrate this victory for the women of my adopted state and all of us living in a country that does find a way forward to freedom and hope for all.

June 29, 2016 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)



## UUWF Advocacy Update: A Full Plate



The UUWF issues survey, which was circulated last year, helps guide our social justice advocacy work on behalf of women and girls. We have continued to focus on reproductive justice, economic justice, ending domestic violence and sexual assault, and will be finding more ways to speak out on the impact of climate change. This is a full public policy plate.

Assaults on reproductive freedom have multiplied on the state level, including the most recent bill passed by the Oklahoma legislature that would have criminalized abortion providers. It was vetoed by the governor. But there is much to watch on the national front in this Presidential election year as well.

There are numerous and repeated attempts in Congress to add and broaden abortion restrictions to federal programs, including hearings held by a subcommittee investigating the legality of AmeriCorps members in New York City community health center who provided compassionate emotional support to women seeking pregnancy termination. Throughout the budget development process, there have been riders (language) prohibiting public financing of abortion services.

While most of the activity on Capitol Hill is uphill and defensive, there have also been proactive efforts to make positive change. President Obama has issued an order mandating overtime pay for jobs previously not covered by this requirement; a little more than half of the beneficiaries will be women workers. The U.S. Senate just passed a bill that lays out a set of rights for victims of sexual assault, including the right to be informed of forensic tests, to prevent victims from being charged for rape kit testing, and to have evidence preserved without charge for 20 years or until the statute of limitations expires. It now goes to the House Judiciary Committee.

And even in the often discouraging arena of reproductive rights, two significant positive measures have been introduced or re-introduced. UUWF has joined a number of other faith based and secular organizations to endorse the [Women's Health Protection Act](#), a critical proactive bill which would enact protections at the federal level to ensure the right of every individual to make their own decisions about whether and when to have children. It is a bold and major attempt to over-ride some of the most odious state laws that have been proposed, and in many cases passed, in recent years. It would invalidate state TRAP laws (targeted regulation of abortion providers), end requirements that doctors have hospital admitting privileges—which has so gutted abortion clinics in places like Texas—and prevent the numerous pre-viability abortion bans that so limit the decision-making agency of women.

Additionally, the UUWF has joined the National Women's Law Center, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the National Council of Jewish Women, and other advocates in endorsing the reintroduction of the [Access to Birth Control Act](#), reaffirming the right to obtain contraceptives from pharmacies and requiring the provision thereof without threats, harassment, or outright denial of services.

This year's version of the bill has added language prohibiting the use of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) as a basis for challenging the application or enforcement of this law. We will be joining other efforts in the coming weeks and months to object to the use of RFRA to privilege one individual's religious beliefs over another in exercising her right of conscience in decisions about whether or when to have children.

May 27, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [abortion](#), [access](#), [advocacy](#), [birth control](#), [Blog](#), [reproductive justice](#), [unitarian](#), [uuwf](#)

## Real Religious Freedom



In late March, almost exactly six years after President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law — as pointed out by Caroline Fredrickson from the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy — the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in *Zubik v Burwell*. This case was based on a number of separate law suits filed by a group of religious non-profits who believe that even filing paperwork to exempt them from covering birth control under their insurance plans is a “sin.” They argue that, by doing so, they “trigger” alternative means of providing this to employees directly through the government and its preventive health care insurance mandate.

In Fredrickson’s Huffington Post blog, she speculated that SCOTUS would affirm the decisions of eight federal appellate courts that this accommodation does not pose a “substantial burden” on the religious beliefs of these employers as protected under the Religious Freedom Act. On the contrary, a win by these plaintiffs would overly burden those individuals whose workplace denies or obstructs their right to certain contraceptive choices.

The assumption was that the case would be settled once and for all, with all its constitutional implications, and that the so-called religious freedom violation charge would fail.

A public radio court correspondent predicted a week or so back that this particular decision would be among the last issued this SCOTUS session, sometime in late June because of its weight and potential controversy.

On the contrary, the court issued its opinion this week — and it was a non-opinion.

They sent the case(s) back to the lower courts in hopes, they wrote, of both sides compromising. Hence this statement from the UUWF and a piece of proposed federal law:

### RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation, a founding member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) joins with our sister faith based organizations in expressing disappointment and concern for the human reproductive rights of women that the U Supreme Court avoided issuing a ruling in *Zubik v. Burwell*, a case brought by religiously affiliated non-profit employers who do not want to have any role in giving their employees access to contraception.

These employers, in seven separate law suits, had claimed that the requirement under the Affordable Care Act that they must notify their insurer or the government that they object to providing coverage, at which point the government would provide birth control at no cost to these employers still violates the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)

Instead of making a decision on the merits of the case, the SCOTUS has returned the case to lower federal appeals courts, all but one previously siding with the government and against the nonprofits.

Their decisions have been voided and the Supreme Court has asked both parties in the suit to work on crafting compromises.

“As an affiliate organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we affirm the inherent worth of every woman and the right of conscience,” said Dr. Kirstie Lewis, President of the Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation (UUWF).

“We do not see claims of religious liberty as grounds for religious organizations to interfere in the coverage of contraception for their employees. In our view, the Supreme Court lost an important opportunity to bring these religious liberty arguments to an end and to validate the choices of women whether they work for religious institutions or not.”

Along with some 40 organizations, UUWF has signed on to support the just introduced the Do No Harm Act, announced this week by Representatives Joe Kennedy (D-MA) and Bobby Scott (D-VA). This legislation would amend RFRA to protect the religious, civil and conscience-based rights of individuals. The Do No Harm act would restore the original intent of RFRA by ensuring that it cannot be misused to discriminate and harm others, including circumstances where access to health care may be blocked or hampered.

May 20, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [do no harm](#), [scotus](#), [zubik](#)

## Taxing Periods



Pagan Kelly, who has written a book about world changing inventions, observes that since ancient times women have tinkered with pads and tampons to better contain their menstrual flow. Everything from papyrus to absorbent mosses, to repurposed cellulose bandages. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lillian Gilbreth, one of the first female Ph.D. engineers, questioned thousands of women in her effort to discover what an ideal sanitary napkin would look and feel like. Even still, corporate manufacturers of these products, including Proctor and Gamble, clung to “brick-like sanitary pads,” long after female consumers nixed this chafing, bulky model.

When Kelly dug through 200 patents granted for feminine napkins and tampons since 1976, she “found that three out of every four of the inventors behind

these patents were men,” and “clearly men have exerted an enormous amount of control over the look and feel of menstrual products.”

Increasingly for most American women, since it became available the tampon has been the method of choice, providing essential comfort and freedom of movement, and the ability— extreme pain or unusually heavy flow withstanding—to keep on with our daily lives. Which includes being able to go to school or show up for work and earn a living every day of the month.

Among the other female reproductive human rights matters that have sporadically dotted this year’s general election campaign season is the economic justice issue of what is being called the tampon tax. These essential health products have been considered luxury items in all but a handful of states, as opposed to a long list of other things that are considered personal necessities: groceries, prescriptions, some over-the-counter drugs, clothes ( in some states), and agricultural supplies.

California assemblywoman Christina Garcia has been hearing from women in her district for a while now. She says they talked a lot about their daily struggles and “how it all adds up,” including the tax on feminine hygiene products. Garcia became convinced that pads and sanitary napkins are undoubtedly a basic necessity, not a luxury at all, and should not be taxed— a tax which only impacts women, who find themselves “ at the wrong end of the gender wage gap” already.

A group of Michigan legislators are also trying to repeal the sales tax on these products. A tax made more ludicrous given that Michigan is among a handful of states that, while treating products to manage periods a luxury, do not tax junk food like candy or soda.

And some women in Ohio are suing the state’s Department of Taxation, labeling this kind of tax discriminatory and calling for its repeal.

The amount of taxes an individual woman might pay annually when she purchases her pads or tampons may be small, but it adds up to considerable revenue for state coffers: In Ohio it totals around \$11 million a year from menstruating women.

But besides the gender injustice of such a levy, for many low income women the cost of period protection is a real barrier. Food stamps and W.I.C. may not be used for these purchases, nor for so many other items such as toothpaste, toilet paper, and other non-food necessities. When I worked with homeless women, while they were grateful for the casseroles and sandwiches we provided, they were most appreciative for access to a closet filled with headache relief pills, shampoo, hand soap, and those feminine hygiene products that make such a difference—after all these centuries—in how we manage this deeply personal part of our reproductive lives.

I read an article this week about two teens who collect tampons and other feminine hygiene products for distribution to poor women and girls. This is a worthy enterprise, one that might well be replicated in our congregations as a charitable activity. Coupled, hopefully, with vocal and determined campaigns in the 45 states that tax menstruation. We can overturn this injustice.

April 21, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## Equal Pay for Equal Play (and all other kinds of work)

In the ecology of our marriage, my spouse can count on me to at least glance at the book review section of the paper—and the obituaries. I can count on him reading the sports section. And then we depend on each other to point out those articles and columns that might be of interest.



So it was not unexpected that he would hand me an essay by soccer player Carli Lloyd, published right before Equal Pay Day 2016. In it, she wrote that she has proudly worn a U.S. national women's team uniform for 12 years, and in this role had some of the greatest moments of her life—winning two Olympic gold medals and the 2015 Women's World cup.

Which did not stop her, she wrote, from joining four teammates in filing a wage discrimination complaint against US soccer. Despite her love of the game, she was called to “do what's right and what's fair, and upholding a fundamental American concept: equal pay for equal play.”

She's done, she declared, with being treated like a second class citizen. Sick of being told by the soccer federation that the women's proposal for increased compensation has been summarily rejected. Despite being the most successful team in the history of U.S. soccer—including both male and female teams—capturing three World Cups, attracting the highest television rating for the sport in history, and helping to generate \$17.7 million in profit for the professional association that turned Lloyd and other players down.

Saying that she doesn't want to bury us with numbers, she does provide some impressive and distressing facts: the fact, for example, that the top five players on the men's team make an average of \$406,000 each year, while the top five women are guaranteed only \$72,000 a year. Even the bonuses are lopsided, with males on championship teams awarded \$390,000 and women just \$75,000.

Lots of money either way to be sure, with incomes far ahead of the vast majority of women in this country, let alone around the world. Carli Lloyd is aware of the disparities, as she is aware also that “the fact that women are being mistreated financially is, sadly, not a breaking news story. It goes on in every field.”

“This isn't about a money grab,” she says. “It's about treating people the way they deserve to be treated, no matter their gender.”

Today, on this one day each year when there might be some press coverage or some air time about the perennial issue of income inequality, her story at the least has gone a bit viral.

Here are some other equally startling and newsworthy statistics about the gender gap around paychecks:

A new analysis conducted by the National Partnership for Women & Families found that, on average, American women who are employed full-time are paid just 79 cents for every dollar paid to

men—a yearly pay gap of \$10,762. This is in addition to less money available for other necessities and for savings, as well as lower pensions and Social Security safety nets when we stop working.

For more information, visit [www.NationalPartnership.org](http://www.NationalPartnership.org).

April 12, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [Carli Lloyd](#), [equal pay](#), [soccer](#)

## **Raised by the 2nd Wave; Moving Forward With the 3rd Wave**



Shaya French

I can't remember a moment when I wasn't a feminist. I grew up surrounded by feminists: my mother, her friends, my father... Growing up I attended performances of [That Takes Ovaries](#) and read a constant supply of fiction books with powerful women and girl protagonists. My dad's copy of *Our Bodies Our Selves* lived in my bedroom.

### **Growing Up Feminist**

I grew up being conscious of how my experiences were affected by gendered power dynamics. I recognized how few women were held up as important historical figures in my elementary school classes and chose to study important women on every history project I could.



Micky Bradford, a Black transwoman, resists police in North Carolina. This image was created by Micah Bazant in collaboration with Micky to launch the Transgender Law Center at Southerners on New Ground's (TLC@SONG) new Southern listening Campaign.

This understanding didn't keep me from being socialized as a woman. I certainly absorbed the unconscious lessons about when I should speak or not, holding back in conversations until I had thought through whether what I was saying was sufficiently important to say aloud. But even as I was internalizing those hard lessons, I could also point out that the conversational dynamics I was part of were sexist. I feel incredibly grateful for having the second wave sensibilities embedded in my consciousness.

### **Where is vibrant feminist community happening today?**

When I was in my college years I did not find a strong feminist community. I checked out the feminist group on my campus but it wasn't super active. The summer after my freshman year of college I visited a feminist meet-up group in my home city. But I didn't find the vibrancy and instant connection that I was looking for. It all felt like feminism was something people did in their spare time and not completely core to their identity.

The place where I found the most excitement about talking about gender inequity was with friends who are part of the LGBTQ community. The people in this amazing community use a wide range of words to describe their gender: queer, genderqueer, femme lesbian, woman, butch, transgender, man, to name a few. Queer has been reclaimed as a descriptive word for people whose gender or sexuality falls beyond our notions of male/female or heterosexual. These are spaces where I can point out when men take up too much of the conversational space and have people back me up. We often talk about the complexities of consent. How can people who are shy still ask for consent? At what point can you substitute reading body language for verbal consent? What's interesting to me is that many of the people with whom I've had the most discussion of issues I recognize as clearly feminist would not necessarily identify as women.

## The Current Gender Justice Movement

I see a striking amount of commonality between the struggles for gender justice that the women's movement took up and those that my peers and I are fighting for now. We all want healthcare designed for and responsive to our needs, elected representatives who share our identity, job opportunities free from discrimination, and to live free from physical or sexual violence. However, the call from black feminists, like [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), to be more intersectional has shaped the current gender justice movement to first address the needs of those who are most marginalized in our society. Being in queer spaces, I have heard firsthand accounts of issues I don't experience directly—transwomen being violently harassed by police and strangers on the street, the higher incarceration rates for people who are gender non-conforming and transgender, and how family and strangers constantly challenging one's gender presentation causes people intense anxiety and depression.

Hearing those stories made me realize that my white privilege had kept me from seeing how the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement is a gender justice movement as well as a racial justice movement. I find it very encouraging that the leadership of young black leaders—many of whom are queer—has given rise to a new black liberation movement that centers spaces for healing, creation and visioning. I'm excited about the future of our gender justice movement—in all its forms—and how making space for a diversity of gender identities pushes us further towards a world where people's gender doesn't dictate how they're treated or what resources they have.

March 31, 2016 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [black lives matter](#), [Blog](#), [gender justice](#), [third wave](#)

## On My Honor



On International Women's Day 2016, I was in our nation's capital meeting with a group of faith leaders who gather live twice a year to share stories of efforts across the country to protect reproductive choice and achieve reproductive justice. We met, appropriately, at the headquarters of a human rights organization. At the desk where we checked in, there were two open boxes of cookies to welcome us – at 8:20 in the morning.

Girl Scout cookies. Also how appropriate.

On March 8th, we honor the achievements and lift up the threats to women around the world: listing the female scientists, authors, artists, performers, and politicians who have paved the way. We collect lists of books to read, movies to watch, histories to study. We do this so that the lives of adult women might be improved and enriched, even saved. We do this so that the lives of girls, present and future, might be bettered as well.

So those familiar (to most of us) smallish green four dollar boxes are so emblematic of what our wishes for girls might be. The meme on the back is “Oh, what a girl can do!”

On every box is a description of the cookie sales program and what it teaches girls: goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills, and business ethics. It is a program and an agenda for self-development that has been a means for troops to fund activities since the first cookie drive was organized in 1917 by the Muskogee Oklahoma's Mistletoe Troop. According to an article

in *Smithsonian Magazine*, instead of being sold door to door (or as is now more common in front of grocery stores and even, most recently, privately online), these first baked goods were sold in a local high school cafeteria.

By the time I was a Brownie Scout (now called Cadette) in the mid-20th century, commercial bakers were producing the familiar staples: a sandwich cookie, shortbread, and chocolate drenched Thin Mints (still a quarter of all cookie sales.)

Truth be told I hated selling those cookies, and wasn't crazy about some of the merit badge requirements, like learning to tuck hospital corners and sew aprons. But I loved the camping, the singing, even learning how to fold a flag properly at the end of every day. And I remained an active scout until early high school. If I was a Scout today, I could earn a badge called Common Ground – strategies for bringing people together – and a UU Religion in Life emblem to wear proudly on my more stylish uniform.

I remember making the Girl Scout promise lustily over so many years and in so many settings, from school auditoriums to a rustic dining hall in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Covenanting, among other things, to help people at all times; to obey the scout laws; to do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong; to respect myself and others; and to make the world a better place.

In this new century, as always, the Girl Scouts have remained resolute in their values but have evolved in the ways they have acted on them: including locally-based programs on human sexuality and, most recently, welcoming transgender girls.

This has led to a call by at least one Catholic official, St. Louis Archbishop Robert Carlson, to urge members of his parishes to boycott the Girl Scouts, including this year's annual cookie sale. In his letter, he cited Girl Scout support for "transgender rights, homosexuality, and other stances at odds with Catholic values."

In a call to action, Catholics for Choice urged everyday Catholics – and others – to buy cookies from a local Girl Scout troop, to make a donation to the Eastern Missouri Girl Scouts or Girl Scouts of the USA, and send a letter of support to your local Girl Scout council.

Just a week or so left until the cookie sale is over for this year. In my house, we are down to only one box of Thin Mints and one of shortbread Trifoils. But there are six more varieties out there, including Mango Cremes and Lemonades. And a sales table nearby.

March 9, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog, cookies, girl scouts, on my honor](#)

## Women after Scalia



I got the news of the discovery of an elderly man found dead of natural causes in his room at a remote ranch in Texas the way so many of us do nowadays: from a news app on my smartphone. It happened to be while I was walking with my husband on a white sand beach on the Gulf of Mexico.

News that could change the course of gender justice for American women for years to come.

Supreme Court (SCOTUS) Justice Antonin

Scalia's sudden death at 79 years old has heated up an already volatile presidential campaign when, only hours after the announcement of his passing, Senate leaders and the candidates from one party declared their intention to block any attempt to allow President Obama—as is his constitutional duty—to nominate and have hearings held to vote on his choice to fill this vacancy.

Candidates—and voters—on either side of the conservative/progressive divide realize that the makeup of the court, beginning with filling this position, cannot be underestimated in terms of the power this body holds over our day to day lives and the future of our nation. (And the global community, as their most recent vote to block implementation of our participation in climate accords.)

Until such time as this happens, an eight member, deeply divided Court may well issue split 4-4 decisions which will have a great impact, in the case of women's reproductive rights, either for good or ill. And if (or rather when) the nomination process goes forward, the choice of replacement for Justice Scalia may change the tenor and majority rulings of SCOTUS in critical ways.

Katha Pollitt, feminist essayist and columnist for *The Nation*, has written a piece titled “America Changed. Antonin Scalia Never Did.” She noted that his vote was part of a 5-4 majority in opinions directly impacting women: gutting the Violence Against Women Act and the Hobby Lobby case, which favored the so called religious freedom rights of closely held corporations over their female employees in the mandate to offer contraceptive coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

And if he had his way, she believes it might well have been much worse.

“In his world,” she writes, “women would be barred from the Virginia Military Institute, *Roe v Wade* would long be overturned... The list goes on and on.”

On women's rights, Pollitt says, we have moved far away from the world view and legal opinions of this conservative Catholic. While his positions may have been more in sync with social mores of Reagan-era America when he was appointed in 1986, they were dissonant by the time he died.

In the area of abortion rights, he continued to have some popular backing, Pollitt tells us: late trimester abortion and so called partial birth abortions for example. But in terms of the case that he



would have been ruling on during this session of SCOTUS—*Whole Women's Health v Hellerstedt*, the case involving a new law in Texas imposing onerous restrictions on clinics providing pregnancy terminations—when polled large majorities of voters don't approve. They understand that the desired legislative outcome was not to make abortions safer, but to shut down the providers of this procedure.

There is no way of absolutely predicting what may have been the decision if Scalia had not died and left a vacancy. It may have been that Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has been a swing vote on some of these cases, would have voted with a 5-4 majority to disagree with the district federal court decision and to overturn this law, as well as similar laws passed in Louisiana and Mississippi.

If the position remains unfilled prior to the hearing and a tie vote results, the original lower court ruling would prevail, but would not apply to future state laws in other jurisdictions imposing the same or similar regulations unless and until another case is presented to SCOTUS.

Or the court could decide to rehear the case completely once a new justice is appointed, delaying any decision, which leaves wide open any speculation on what might happen, as it is so dependent on who the replacement might be—and who appoints her or him.

The second case those of us who focus on reproductive rights are closely following this session is the second case to be heard by SCOTUS on the Affordable Care Act mandate for employers to provide birth control coverage to women workers, *Zubik v Burwell*. In this case, the lower courts have been divided. If there is a 4-4 Supreme Court tie, there will be no decision.

In other words, if this vacancy remains unfilled for any length of time, decisions may well be stalled or muddled.

This week the UU Women's Federation signed on to an [interfaith letter](#) to the U.S. Senate, originated by the National Council of Jewish Women and joined by other members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. In it, we urged the President and Senate to fulfill their constitutional duties to fill the vacancy in order to see a civil, fair, and expeditious process.

“As people of faith, we are inspired and informed by the pursuit of justice...” our letter maintains. “If we fail to expeditiously advance the filling of the current vacancy, we abdicate our responsibility to justly serve the dignity of all.”

February 19, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## Under Those Capitol Domes



Twenty years ago I was spending most days under the gold dome of the state capitol in Atlanta. The dome is literally gold, mined in Dahlonega, Georgia, site of the first major gold rush in this country in 1839. Every morning I would don my dress for success—or at least gravitas—suit, my black pumps, my conservative jewelry purchased at a major department store counter. Took the rapid transit to a station directly across from the imposing building.

In 1996, those of us who worked as advocates for women and children, especially low income families, were facing aggressive efforts to “reform” the federal welfare system, by which they meant the small cash grants (and food stamp vouchers) given to single women with minor children. In this case, we not only had to battle attempts by fiscal and social conservatives but also President Bill Clinton, who was determined to fulfill his campaign promise in 1992 to “end welfare as we know it,” by creating the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Under this new system, there was—and still is—a work requirement for all recipients, regardless of the age of their children, their education and training, the availability of childcare, and other factors that make the job of providing for poor families so much more difficult.

The specter of the long-term aftermath of this—at best uninformed and at worst callous—action began to haunt me even when I wasn’t working as a grassroots legislative advocate. I did not have a crystal ball to project out ten years to see the full impact of this policy shift, but my head and heart told me that this was deeply cruel and wrong.

This policy was embraced by the legislators I came in contact with on the state level as they predictably introduced legislation each session that would, on one hand, limit access to safe, legal abortion and sound sex education—and at the same time create budgets that slashed funds for foster care, childcare, and other services for vulnerable children.

My despair mounted as I climbed those steps to the capitol, knowing that not only could I never count on the usual foes to do what I thought was the morally right thing, but I was also witnessing pragmatic resignation by representatives I had reason to believe knew what needed to happen, and fellow “lobbyists” who were, seemingly, more interested in “sitting at the table” and being close to the center of power, no matter what.

At that time I had completed the training and been installed as a lay minister in my UU congregation, creating an increasingly painful contrast between a kind of born again embrace of our purposes and principles—values like inherent worth and dignity and right of conscience and the interdependent web of existence—and the bankruptcy of secular social justice work.

More often than not, I would leave sessions at that State Capitol or meetings with fellow advocates with the constant ringing question: “*Where* are we coming from?” I did not mean logistically or intellectually. I meant what was the ultimate significance of what we were doing, ostensibly on behalf of marginalized people? What was I ultimately committed to in the midst of all my frenetic activism,

with all the time, energy, and emotional and moral demands it made on me. These questions went unanswered as the daily efforts spun on.

So I began my journey toward UU ministry, to experience its full breadth and depth, hoping this would enable me to eventually work for change from a more grounded and sustainable place.

And I left the capitol, only returning occasionally to, as I said then, “pray in my fashion.” I have attended interfaith vigils, Moral Monday gatherings, and a couple of years back had the honor of delivering the invocation on Clergy Day at the capitol for the State Senate.

Two weeks ago, I decided to return on Wednesdays to participate in “Women Walk the Halls,” organized by Planned Parenthood and the ACLU. Now is the time to see what has changed.

For me.

*Next time: A look at state focused advocacy by UUs.*

February 1, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## After Roe, Who Leads?



By Shaya French

The anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* is right around the corner. UUs have played an important role in the struggle for reproductive rights. We continue to face a strong anti-reproductive health movement from the right. At the same time, we are called to be intersectional in the way we think about issues. How do we do that? We need to take our lead from women of color—leaders of the reproductive justice movement—who have a clear vision of the links between reproductive, race, environmental, class, LGBTQ and disability issues.

In the early 1970s the Women's Alliance at the First Unitarian Church in Dallas was instrumental

in bringing *Roe v. Wade* to the Supreme Court. [The congregation's leaders encouraged the lead attorney, Sarah Weddington, to pursue the case](#) even though she was beginning her career and was not sure she wanted to be involved in such a controversial case. Weddington and members of the Alliance received the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation Ministry to Women Award in 2005 for their work. UUs carry a legacy of standing on the side of women being able to have choices about our bodies and autonomy.

Since *Roe*, the religious right and anti-abortion movement have undermined *Roe*, limiting the access to abortions for many women. Most seriously, the Hyde Amendment prohibits the use of federal funds including Medicaid to fund abortion. State laws, such as Texas's HB2 law, have forced clinics to shut down. The burden of these laws has fallen mainly on women of color and poor women. While at the same time, there are many issues beyond access to abortion including polluted neighborhoods, forced sterilization, and poverty that affect marginalized women. In the early 1990s women of color held several gatherings to talk about their needs and created the reproductive justice movement, which expands the focus from abortion legality to consideration of a broader range of issues that affect the right of people to have or not have children, raise them in safe and healthy environments, and express their sexuality without oppression.

Unitarian Universalists have taken a lead among faith communities in adopting reproductive justice. In 2008, UUs at the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood became interested in the reproductive justice frame and had many conversations with Lynn Roberts, PhD, then board member of [SisterSong](#), a national reproductive justice organization. Mandy Restivo-Walsh and Carol Loscalzo, two Ridgewood women who'd been working on reproductive justice issues their entire lives, brought the issue to the 2012 General Assembly where it was adopted. This put UUs again at the forefront of history as one of the first faith organizations to adopt the reproductive justice framework.

We are in a movement moment for racial justice.

Adopting reproductive justice aligns our women's issues work with this current moment in history—the push for racial justice and the valuing of black lives. But are our actions in line with this framework? What reproductive justice issues should we be working on in 2016? Whose leadership do we look for in answering these questions?

Join national reproductive justice leaders on January 20th at 1 pm EST. [SisterSong](#)'s Monica Simpson, Miriam Yeung from the [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum](#) (NAPAWF), Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas from the [National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health](#), and Tannia Esparza from [Young Women United](#) will be answering the question **“What does reproductive justice look like in 2016?”**

[Register to participate now!](#)

Further Resources:

[Preach about reproductive justice on the anniversary of \*Roe v. Wade\*.](#)

[Two Things Every UU Should Know about Reproductive Justice](#)

*Shaya French is the UUA's Clara Barton Intern for Multicultural Growth & Witness*

January 15, 2016 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [abortion](#), [Blog](#), [collective voices](#), [reproductive justice](#), [unitarian](#), [uua](#), [uuwf](#), [women](#)

## A Force to Be Reckoned With



A female actor in her late fifties is offered a small part in what turns out to be potentially the biggest box office movie ever. She reprises the role that propelled her into stardom more than 30 years earlier: albeit much older, sadder and wiser. While her male co-star, also returning to a part that fast tracked him into Hollywood fame, is given a generous pass for his inevitable aging, she is not.

She is called old and unattractive. She is body shamed.

Carrie Fisher, who plays General Leia in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, is no stranger to critique and negative exposure of her personal life. Daughter of stars Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, whose broken marriage was splashed on the covers of entertainment magazines and dailies, she grew up in the tawdry limelight. Her struggles with addiction, battle with mental illness, and yo-yo weight have been fodder for mass market gossip. She has exposed them herself in her funny and courageous memoirs and an award-winning one woman show.

Knowing that her detractors were out there, knowing she would be subject to more scrutiny of her appearance and the passage of years, she said yes anyway. She said yes out of fondness for the Star Wars franchise, and perhaps also because—like many other actresses in her age cohort—the good parts, the attractive offers, have tapered off. In the past few years, she has focused on productions of her autobiographical *Wishful Drinking*, appeared on an episode of *30 Rock*, and done some work on British television.

This was, after all, an employment opportunity. So she got in shape, plunged into her role—barely more than a cameo at that—and still was subjected to scathing scrutiny of her face, her body, her demeanor.

Carrie Fisher's economic status, given where she came from and the trajectory of her career, is not that of the average female worker over 50. But the signs are there: scantier offers, further between than most men of the same age.

A new study on long-term unemployment conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank (as reported in the *New York Times*) revealed that while, before the most recent recession less than a quarter of women over 50 were among the ranks of the jobless after six months, following the downturn the percentage rose to comprising half of all those unemployed.

When women of a certain age find themselves without a job, for whatever reason, they are stuck there much longer, observes Sara E. Dix, a senior researcher for AARP, the largest organization advocating for seniors in this country. They are less likely than displaced men of the same ages to be re-employed, she notes, and more likely to permanently leave the workplace sooner.

And when they face joblessness, older female workers find themselves in worse financial situations, often with gaps in their work histories due to family responsibilities, smaller lifetime pay checks and social security benefits, and less savings.

The issues survey taken by hundreds of UU women last summer informed the UUWF that, along with reproductive justice, economic justice is a leading concern. The intersection of ageism and sexism that seems to be happening at 50 for so many women is one of these. I welcome your stories.

January 6, 2016 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Wherein Lies Some Hope



Colleague UU minister Meg Riley, who serves our Church of the Larger Fellowship, has been sending out morning conversation starters to her CLF Monthly Theme Discussion Group around this month's theme of hope. Where are the sources for us, personally, and for an especially battered world in 2015? One of them was the hope she finds in teamwork, the strength of collective power—as she wrote—collective joy.

In this period between Thanksgiving (and an earlier than usual Hanukkah observance) and the day late this week—or next week—when many but not all of us knock off for the duration, Congress is still meeting, court cases are being prepared. There is little time to slack and much to fear for the future of true reproductive justice, access to the choices and services necessary to turn personal decisions into reality.

The notion of immensely hopeful teamwork came up for me as I participated, as always remotely, in the monthly meeting of the Reproductive Advocates Working Group this week. I wasn't in the room but could picture the mostly younger, mostly female group of spirited, dedicated justice nerds (in the most affectionate sense of the word) sitting around a table, comparing notes, sharing intelligence. Plotting strategies on the upcoming campaigns to stave off further insurance barriers to securing contraception, and help win what is arguably the most important abortion rights case to reach the Supreme Court in 20 years. In the midst of the serious business, I heard praise, support, and even blessed laughter.

What might we do together? What pieces might individual groups take on for the good of the whole? Who has the bandwidth and expertise to craft amicus briefs—legal letters laying out our case for the best judicial decision? Who can take the lead on social media: craft Facebook posts, orchestrate Twitter thunder claps? What can be shared?

One piece of generous and immensely helpful (to me) sharing was a [blog](#) written by **Tracy Wolf** from the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#). One of a series of expected pieces on reproductive rights at the Court, this one covered an upcoming case focusing on “accommodation for religious non-profits in providing—or not—contraceptive coverage for their employees. Wolf gifts us, provides our team with a concise explanation of what is at issue and what is at stake.

Earlier in the week, advocacy partner/team member Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe from [Catholics for Choice](#), wrote the letter to Congressional leadership that UUWF signed, along with more than 20 other faith organizations, opposing the Abortion Non Discrimination Act. This proposed rider on the year-end federal funding seeks to expand the right of refusal beyond individual providers to institutions and any healthcare facility.

“We support access to abortion, contraception, and other reproductive health services, and oppose public policies that impose belief by religious fiat,” our letter states emphatically.



Our ability to sign on to well-thought-out and crafted communications has been possible because of a shared commitment to getting the work done well. My thanks also go to **Amy Cotton** from the [National Council for Jewish Women](#), who, along with **Glenn Northern** from [Catholics for Choice](#), have taken leadership roles in our faith campaign over the past months to stand with Planned Parenthood.

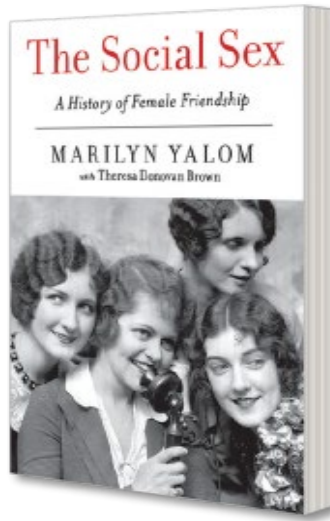
And our own UU minister, **Rev Debra Haffner**, and the [Religious Institute](#), for reaching out to clergy and other faith leaders to sign on to a special amicus brief on the case, *Whole Woman's Health vs. Cole*, challenging onerous requirements in a Texas law which, if allowed to remain on the books, would force most of the abortion clinics in that state to close and set a chilling precedent for many others.

I am proud to have signed on as the ordained minister serving the UUWF, joining 650 others so far, on the way to 1,000 or more.

In this season, my heart is filled with gratitude for the gift of gifts I have been given—and we all have received—from these amazing colleagues.

December 18, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The Social Sex



A recent article in the science section of my daily newspaper examined the phenomenon of high tech artificial friends for the aging—the ranks, as the story noted, of older and frail adults who are alone and often lonely, still in their own homes. Many, if not most of them, female.

Drones.

The University of Illinois has received a \$1.5 million grant to at least explore the [idea](#) of creating small drones that will assist in simple household chores. These robots and innovative internet-connected technologies, such as programmed Skype connections, are being developed to meet both the crucial practical and social needs of a rapidly increasing population.

A study published last summer found that both healthy and mildly cognitively impaired people in their 70s and 80s who had face-to-face (albeit Facetime) conversations daily online for six weeks showed significant improvements in cognitive functioning.

In the flesh companions would be nice, neurological researchers tell us, but in the meantime simple tablets and smartphones can fill an essential gap in staving off the loneliness that comes from lack of caring contact.

The lack of tactile human friendship.

This prophetic piece appeared the same week as I began reading a new book on the history of female friendship—*The Social Sex* by gender researcher Marilyn Yalom and author Theresa Donovan Brown. In it they explore the nature of these relationships over 2,000 years through formal and informal writings.

For at least 1,000 years, from 600 BCE to the 16th century CE, all the documents referring to friendship “pertained to men,” a male enterprise crucial not only to personal happiness, we are told, but to civic and military solidity. Women’s friendships, all in the private sphere, were considered irrelevant and went unrecorded. The female gender was considered unequipped for what was sometimes called the communion of souls.

The authors take us through biblical sources, the writings of priests and nuns, the plays of Shakespeare, and an expanding body of documents that portray the ways in which women have found each other: in convents, salons, seminaries, quilting circles, church groups, mutual aid societies, and political movements.

Through the life stories of both little known and famous women—religious mystic Teresa of Avila, novelist George Sand, and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt—they illustrate the nature of our platonic and romantic connections. We learn about the forms and functions of friendships among the elite and literate, including Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller’s bookstore conversations, as well as clubs

attended by working women. Popular books, films and television series, from *The Color Purple* to the *Honeymooners* and *Golden Girls* are also plumbed for their depictions and insights.

From being disregarded or disparaged, from forbidden to highly controlled, women's friendships have emerged and endured. Far from non-existent, or inferior to those of males, these bonds have flourished. Indeed, the authors identify the four ingredients that seem to them basic to female friendship: affection, self-revelation, physical contact, and interdependence as serving as healthy models for public relationships across genders.

"Our history suggests that women will continue to show the world how to be friends," the authors conclude.

This book is well worth a read, preferably within the context of a group of women and men who may find its well documented and encouraging findings a vehicle for ever deepening connections.

December 9, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [friendship](#), [social sex](#), [women](#)

## Religion and Rage in Colorado



Six days after his prolonged rampage at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, the man charged with murder in the first degree in the shooting of three people has been exposed for what he is: a virulently anti-abortion domestic terrorist.

Even at his arraignment, the police would not discuss his motive for opening fire on a police officer, an Iraq war vet, and a mother of two children – the latter two accompanying friends who had appointments that day. The official line was that it remained “unclear” whether the accused – Robert L. Dear – had targeted Planned

Parenthood because he was opposed to abortion. This even after a senior law enforcement officer, who asked to be anonymous, reported that following his arrest Dear had said “no more body parts.”

A lengthy investigative article in the *New York Times* (December 2nd) substantiated what witnesses had said following the carnage, that his motives were directly related to his views on abortion. Interviews with a number of people who knew the shooter said that – besides being a serial philanderer, gambler, and wife beater – he is “a staunch abortion opponent.” He has praised people who attacked abortion providers, and was heard to describe as heroes members of the Army of God, a group of anti-choice “extremists” that has, according to the *NY Times*, claimed responsibility for a number of killings and bombings.

In the past several months, there has been a marked escalation of violence or promised violence against Planned Parenthood facilities, in particular following the release of heavily edited videos alleging that PP was in the business of selling fetal tissue and body parts to research labs. However, threats and actual murder of those who work at or visit reproductive health clinics are not new. Since 1993 eight clinic workers, including four doctors, two clinic employees, a clinic escort, and a security guard, have been murdered in the United States. There have been 17 other attempted murders.

The presidential candidates who had frequently linked PP with the doctored video and its allegations and had adamantly called for the defunding and dissolution of the nearly 100-year-old health care provider were silent immediately following the Colorado carnage. Within a few days, they denied any link between their heated, hateful rhetoric and what had happened.

And while House Majority leader Kevin McCarthy told the media that there were no plans this week, as previously announced, to force a showdown between the White House and conservative lawmakers with shutting down PP as a condition of voting for a must-pass spending measure, there are still efforts going forward in a separate bill to do the same.

So we will mourn the deaths and injuries, write the Justice Department demanding that anti-abortion murders be treated as reprehensible acts of terrorism, and work to defeat the callous efforts to shut down providers of women’s health care.

We will stand with Planned Parenthood once again, through our tears.

December 2, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## [Dr. Willie Parker Speaks](#)



Rev. Barbara Prose

The women wept.  
The women cheered.  
The women clapped.

"I feel free, for the first time in my life. I've never felt so free," she said as she hugged me and wouldn't let me go.

And the men wept, cheered and clapped too. "It's my story too," the father told me as he hugged and thanked me for bringing Dr. Willie Parker to Tulsa. "It's so good to hear this spoken by a physician, a man... a black man. It makes me more *confident* that my views as a liberal, white woman are rooted in rational, authentically religious, and righteous ground."

It was more than I needed to hear to know that bringing Dr. Willie Parker, a man who provides abortions *because* he is a Christian, not in spite of that fact, had changed the playing field in the buckle of the bible belt. But there was more.

The son of an All Souls member said, "They should have made other t-shirts too. For men and boys. I want one that says, '*Her God. Her Body. Her Decision.*'" It was almost too good to be true.

From the Friday evening cocktail party/fundraiser, to the Saturday afternoon reproductive loss training, to the Saturday evening panel, to Sunday morning worship — Tulsa, Oklahoma's first-ever Reproductive Justice weekend was a phenomenal success. Dr. Willie preached two fabulous sermons. Let's make them *go viral!*

'JESUS AND THE A-WORD' (Dr. Willie J. Parker, MD, MPH, MSC)

[Complete Video](#)

[Promo Video](#)

[Audio](#)

'AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE UNKNOWN GOD' (Dr. Willie J. Parker, MD, MPH, MSC)

[Complete Video](#)

[Promo Video](#)

[Audio](#)

The time is now. As our citizens become more aware of the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, let's lift up the fact that heterosexual women also have the right to decide with whom they will have sex, and whether or not they will have babies.

As Dr. Willie taught us Tulsans, let's turn the question of concern around. Ask not, "What will happen to me if I stop to help a woman in need?" Ask instead, "What will happen to the woman if I don't stop and help?"

Jesus never felt the need to shame a woman. Why would anyone else, especially a Christian? Never forget the power of a positive no. The kind of no that leads to an even more powerful yes.

NO, every sperm and every egg, will not and need not become a baby.  
YES, every child needs to be well cared for.

NO, every woman does not want or need to be a mother.  
YES, many women will continue wanting to be mothers.

NO, every sexual act will not and need not create a baby.  
YES, people will keep having sex to make babies.

NO, trusting women to control their own bodies will not lead to decreased population rates.  
YES, trusting women to control their own bodies will increase women's capacity to care for the children they have.

NO, choosing an abortion does not mean a woman will not have another child.  
YES, a majority of women who have abortions are already mothers and will give birth to more children.

NO, choosing an abortion does not make a woman a monster, a murderer, or a slut.  
YES, choosing an abortion often means a woman is taking responsibility for her life and whatever children she already has and plans to have in the future.

NO, women enjoying sex is not dangerous.  
YES, women have a right to enjoy sex and be protected from pregnancy so they can.

NO, rich women don't deserve easier access to reproductive health care.  
YES, all women deserve equal access to basic health care, which means reproductive services.

Here's another sermon on the subject, [The Power of a Positive No](#).

The women and men wept.  
The women and men cheered and clapped.  
The gay, lesbian, transgender, and non-binary community members wept, cheered and clapped too.  
Because, finally, it all made so much sense.

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*Rev. Barbara Prose is a mother, a midwife and a minister. She is Executive Director of Ministry at All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, OK; and a member of the New Prophetic Sisterhood advisory circle.*

*My God, My Body, My Decision, Tulsa's first ever Reproductive Justice Weekend, was held Nov 6-8, 2015 and sponsored by All Souls Unitarian Church, OKRCRC, and Hope Unitarian Universalist Church.*

November 18, 2015 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)



## Female Heroes



The headline on the *Philadelphia Inquirer* feature story by reporter Steven Rea says it all: “Female Heroes Fight for Change.”

His was not a piece about Super Girls or Wonder Women or any of the animated Disney princesses who are breaking welcome new ground in movies or television.

His interview with Carey Mulligan, star of *Suffragette*, focused on providing historical background for this lightly fictionalized account of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century movement to win the right to vote for women in Great Britain. The movie dramatizes the hard lives and

extraordinary valor of the real women—rich and poor alike—that eventually led to universal franchise by 1928.

It took decades to get there. The first years of polite and peaceful pleas and timid protests, and the later ones marked by militancy modeled after tactics taken up by Russian revolutionaries.

Miss Mulligan’s character is a laundry worker, wife and mother who denies being involved in the suffrage fight until the combined circumstances of her grim, underpaid, overworked, abused, disrespected and—more often than not—hopeless life trigger a rage in her that matches the collective rage of these plotters of rock-throwing, arson, and other acts of criminal—sometimes violent—defiance.

At least 1,000 women were imprisoned, staged hunger strikes, and were force fed. Their activism led to the loss of their marriages and the loss of their children. They were beaten by their husbands and by the police. As Steven Rea writes, a pivotal event both in the film and in the history of the movement took place on June 4, 1913 when Emily Wilding Davison, in an effort to capture the attention of the King, stepped in front of his horse while it was being raced at the Epsom Derby.

Her death from injuries sustained in her split-second decision to go over the safety barrier was called a suicide. It led to a funeral procession witnessed by crowds of Londoners and captured in newsreel footage that showed around the world. Despite this tragic boost to the notoriety of these fiercely determined women and their singular cause, it took until another 15 years for all British women to get the ballot.

These first wave feminists across the pond were not gentle, angry people (from the song by Holly Near), but rooted in righteous anger, which clinical psychologist Leon Seltzer described in a blog for *Psychology Today* as “the upside of anger.” Righteous anger, as he defines it, is the emotion associated with affirming personal worth and dignity—core Unitarian Universalist moral values. The feeling of injustice which comes from personal and social violations of our sense of honor and self-respect can lead, he tells us, to completely understandable, justifiable, and expressed anger. That, in turn, can lead to social change.

This kind of okay anger, that does not need to be eliminated or at least managed, has always been harder for women to access. Female therapists Deborah Cox, Karin H. Bruckner, and Sally Stabb,

authors of the book *The Anger Advantage*, have studied the link between gender and anger. They've found that, for women much more than men, anger is still a dangerous emotion, a disadvantage in careers, relationships, and social action. We are still discouraged and thwarted, they tell us, from using the tool of anger for gaining what we need, for making a difference in the world.

Our make-believe female super heroes may well know how to fly, to leap tall buildings, tackle brutes, but can they really teach us—teach our daughters and granddaughters—how to own our anger, use it boldly in our search for full equity? I recommend *Suffragettes* as a lesson.

November 9, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Parliament of the World's Religions



*By Rev. Tracy Spronks*

In 1893, several thousand people gathered together on the shore of Lake Michigan in Chicago for the first World's Parliament of Religions. On the first day of this first Parliament, 4000 people watched as twelve representatives from different religious traditions walked into the great hall holding hands and, simultaneously, a

bell tolled for each of the world's great religions. While neither Unitarianism nor Universalism was represented in this parade, among the planners was Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a Unitarian and a supporter of the Iowa Sisterhood. At that Parliament so long ago, the major speakers included nineteen women, one of whom was the Unitarian, Julia Ward Howe; an unprecedented number for that day and age.

From Oct 15 through 19 the sixth Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Salt Lake City, Utah. This time some 10,000 people were in attendance with as many as sixty percent of the registrants being women. A first-ever Women's Assembly was held on October 14, a day before the Parliament officially started, to highlight the responsibility of the world's religions to affirm women's dignity and human rights as well as to offer religious and spiritual inspiration for women's empowerment. This theme would also run throughout the entire four days of the Parliament.

During the women's assembly, each of the women who stood to speak invoked the name of their mothers and grandmothers, honoring all the women who came before. Terry Tempest Williams spoke of being a radical environmentalist and Mormon. Dr. Vandana Shiva spoke of the seed bank she started and the need for ecological preservation. Marianne Williamson inspired us to make our voices heard in the face of those who would silence them. Bishop Barbara King, Grandmother Mary Lyons, and Dr. Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere were inspiring in that they spoke of oneness and unity *and* were still going strong as elders of the sisterhood. Some of these women I had never heard of before and yet such was their presence and their truth and their mission that I found myself standing, applauding, crying, and longing to connect with them and all the women around me.

While this Parliament was historic on many levels, there were breakdowns that arose, reminding us that there is much work to do. For instance, at the opening ceremony after the inaugural women's assembly, all the speakers for the evening were men. How did that happen? The Chairman of the Parliament, Abdul Malik Mujahid, later apologized for this oversight.

Another example: the opening ceremony began with the original people of Utah, the Ute Nation, processing in full ceremonial dress to the sound of native drum music. And yet the governor of Utah, Gov. Herbert, seemed to be unaware of this when he talked of the Mormons settling the state so long ago. We take a step forward and sometimes a few back, but hopefully we still keep moving forward.

New to this Parliament was an answer to a challenge by the Dalai Lama. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama was unable to attend but he challenged organizers and participants to turn their words and nice dialogue

into action. A commitment book was printed and declarations created and signed by participants to take what they learned back into the world with them. Each declaration has four components: personal commitments, organizational commitments, work on policy change, and the media. The Declaration for the Dignity and Human Rights of Women is one of six such declarations.

Amongst the ten thousand or so participants from many faiths were the fifty or so Unitarian Universalists who attended, including Eric Cherry and Jessica York, who staffed a booth on Unitarian Universalism International. The sole UU voice who spoke at the closing plenary was Patty Willis, whose song the whole plenary sang. Her words were few but her song, *Earth is Calling*, was the theme song for the whole Parliament. I encourage Unitarian Universalists to be more involved at the next Parliament, to be held in 2017.

Two powerful moments have stayed with me from my experiences in Utah although, truly, the whole five days were incredible. First was that each day the Sikh community fed the entire assembly — 10,000 people — with a free vegetarian Langar (community meal). The food and hospitality were quite impressive, but more so the humility and gratitude offered us by the Sikh. “We are of service,” they would say to a thank you. Or, “Without you, we would not be able to be of service.”

The second powerful moment that stays with me was during the short promotional film for One Billion Rising, a movement to end violence and abuse towards women. As the short clip ended, some in the crowd held up one finger and then — with gaining speed — the whole entire assembly stood with one finger in the air.

*We are one* they were saying as they stood in silence and in tears, each with their finger held high in the dim convention hall. One person who can make a difference. One community who stands in solidarity with all who seek justice. One world ready to turn it upside down to turn it around. One.

*Rev Tracy Sprowls has been the minister of the UU congregation in Plainfield, NJ since 2009. She is a member of the New Prophetic Sisterhood advisory circle, a new project of UUWF whose mission is to energize, engage, and empower UU female-identified ministers in the service of gender justice and liberation.*

November 2, 2015 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)

## Super Girl: Will She Right the Gender Wrongs?



Back Story: I am not, in general, a comic book fan or, more specifically, a fan of super heroes, male or female. As a child I favored Betty and Veronica, mostly unaware that for a half century there have been Supergirl comics and other DC and Marvel equivalents, including Wonder Woman. My historical perspective on comics is non-existent, as is any in-depth knowledge of the family trees and plot lines of these print and film stories in which, as writer Dave Itzkhoff has described them, women “wear capes, fly through the sky, and throw colossal punches.”

Nonetheless, I had been looking forward to the pilot episode of the new Supergirl television series this week, if just as a welcome diversion from the numbing, crushing assault on the dignity and rights of real life women and girls that has become the norm. Could a fantasy about a millennial woman born with paranormal powers — able like her cousin Superman to morph instantly from a mild mannered human to an alien from another planet, to leap tall buildings, to fly, to wipe out evil enemies of the right and the good — be the antidote we need in order to keep going?

And would she be a credible feminist?

So I did a bit of reading before the show (which has been called the most talked about addition to the big network broadcast line up this fall) was aired. Can this be the primetime superhero show that will finally break the chain of poorly performing shows that came before it: the contemporary Superman series, Batman, the Hulk, and an earlier version of the Flash? Will it dispel the common assumption in Hollywood (including television) that women fantasy heroes are bad box office, and that the increasing success of women titled comic books does not cross media lines?

Will its focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century-style female empowerment (and good production) give it the edge? Let alone the selection of Melissa Benoist, best known for her role as Marley Rose in *Glee*, as Kara Danvers, aka Supergirl, who self identifies as a pacifist who has just recently discovered the satisfaction of “butt-kicking” in the service of being a crusader.

Spoiler Alert: The scene that has attracted the most analysis so far is the one in which — shades of *The Devil Wore Prada* movie — Kara, whose day job is as a meek personal helper to patriarchal female media company head Calista Flockhart, dares question the choice of the name Supergirl: “If we call her Supergirl, something less than what she is, doesn’t that make us guilty of being anti-feminist?” She is soundly put down for fretting about a mere word.

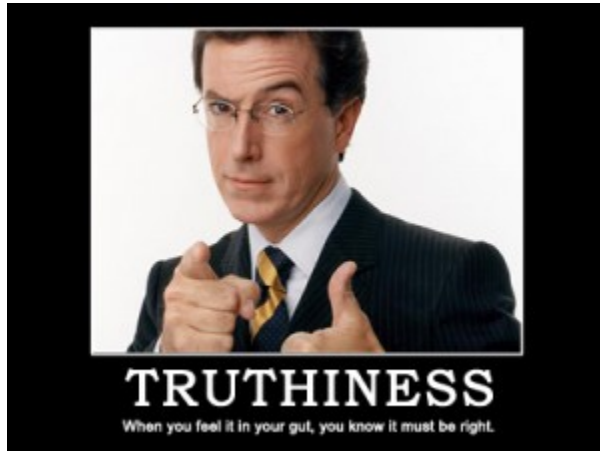
Supergirl or Superwoman, there are moments so far that show her to be a gutsy, righteously angry role model for the younger viewers in particular who might tune in. She presents as a super girl/woman who insists that she has not traveled 2,000 light years to be just an assistant. A super girl/woman who is encouraged to find a way back to the brave, wise, strong and true person she had once been and could be in the future, if she was truly able to use her full powers.

Despite its conventional rating-seeking share of gratuitously violent action scenes, there is something compellingly smart and sassy and even hopeful about Supergirl. Perhaps even something that might spur real conversation about what it means to be a freed up female.

Stay tuned.

October 27, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog, supergirl](#)

## Truthiness ('trooTHēnis/)



Comedian Stephen Colbert first appropriated and gave new life to this rarely used word during the 2005 pilot episode of his long-running Colbert Report.

While its original archaic meaning was “truthfulness, faithfulness,” as used in common vernacular *truthiness* is a quality characterizing a “truth” that a person making an argument or assertion claims to know intuitively “from the gut” or because it “feels right” without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts.

Since it reemerged and was redefined, Truthiness has been used to chastise fact-twisting journalists, reality-bending memoirists, and truthy politicians who have made up “data” to bolster their fame and fortune.

Sadly, Colbert’s satirical nightly news half hour is gone, as he has made his way to a primetime network talk show, but that word so associated with him is still with us. It popped up for me in the last few weeks. It came to mind as congressional representatives from the majority party engaged in unmistakable truthiness in regard to the, as one reporter described them, “furtively recorded” videos that were being released about Planned Parenthood and the issue of fetal tissue. These heavily edited videos were referenced in the recent Republican debate by at least one candidate describing a still-wriggling newborn awaiting her fate – which turned out to be footage of a baby in another setting altogether. These videos have also ostensibly given rise to a House Judiciary hearing on Planned Parenthood, beginning next Wednesday, with one of the accusations – based on the truthiness created by this untruthful video – being that PP has been performing partial birth abortions.

This, despite the findings in state after state that there has been no such violations. These donations in the service of crucial medical research have been carried out without breaking any laws.

There is a weekly section in the daily paper in my city which vigorously investigates the truthfulness of facts presented in a variety of public settings, from editorials to political forums and debates. The worse ranking is “pants on fire.” I would propose that these admittedly doctored videos would fit in this most blatantly falsified category.

As a former journalist (and perhaps one still), I love the power of facts, the strength of statistics. I also worked as the executive director for a statewide organization that produced an annual fact book of indicators of child and family well-being, from infant deaths to high school graduation rates. So I know that, if scrupulously vetted and objectively presented, numbers and documentary means can be well-intentioned and fairly used. In the weeks and months ahead, expect that every effort will be made (and I will confess when I falter) to avoid truthiness and to, in UU fashion, seek and honor truth in the pursuit of justice.

October 10, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [planned parenthood](#), [truthiness](#), [unitarian](#), [uua](#), [uuwf](#)



## The Pope Visits and We Practice Being Allies in our Interfaith Work



Not surprisingly, there has been a great deal of conversation among my Unitarian Universalist ministerial colleagues – and other non-Catholic clergy and lay leaders – about Pope Francis’s visit to the United States last week. How his beliefs and positions sit or don’t sit with our espoused positions and overall world view.

No question that this pope, who passes up pomp and politics for cafeteria style meals with homeless people, and who has expressed over and over his policy preferences on behalf of the poor, has captured the hearts and interfaith imagination of many progressive people. Yet, an editorial in the weekly Jewish newspaper *The Forward* has cautioned that, with the exception of the Pope’s theological insistence on forgiveness in the form of accepted confession by women who have chosen to terminate a pregnancy, and some talk about dialing down the machismo in the world in general and perhaps the Catholic Church in particular, there is “no change in the church’s position against abortion, contraception, women’s rights and marriage equality – at least not in the foreseeable future.”

For me, this much heralded and much covered trip across the waters by the head of a religious body of 1.2 billion people worldwide provides a lesson in what it means to be a faith ally. What is appropriate for me (and, representing the UU Women’s Federation, for us) to do that is respectful to a tradition I am not part of, while realizing its power and recognizing the imperative to act for justice and equity on behalf of women and girls?

Working toward this delicate balance, I turn to our relationship with the national organization, Catholics for Choice, whose mission is to “strive to be an expression of Catholicism, as it is lived by ordinary people.” For this group, that means they are part of what they call the “great majority of the faithful in the Catholic church who disagree with the dictates of the Vatican on matters related to sex, marriage, family life and motherhood. Who affirm that individual Catholics have the right of conscience in making moral decisions about their lives, including their reproductive lives.”

The UUWF was a founding member of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), in which Catholics for Choice plays a prime leadership role, actively lobbying on Capitol Hill to protect and expand policies grounded in sexual and reproductive ethics based on justice. Catholics for Choice most recently worked to craft and disseminate a letter to Congress in defense of Planned Parenthood, which was not an official RCRC activity but one supported by many of its groups.

So I looked in recent days to Catholics for Choice president Jon O’Brian for his understanding of and guidance in framing a response to the Pope and the current mandates of the Church. In the week before the visit, O’Brian released statements from his organization challenging some of the statements made by Pope Francis. When the pope announced this past month that priests now have the discretion to formally forgive abortions and seek absolution, O’Brian lauded him for his pastoral, rather than political, leanings in this regard. O’Brian went on to say that, despite this professed new

bridge to the masses of U.S. Catholic women who use birth control and have the same rate of abortion as those of other faiths or no faith, he does not believe that Catholic women “will be queuing up” for this new chance at a pardon for their decisions.

Another recent strategic press release from Catholics for Choice expressed messages of good will, not condemnation, to women’s clinics and their workers for the important work they do. The statement asserted that most individual Catholics support Planned Parenthood and the services it provides.

In another public statement, O’Brian cautioned against using Pope Francis’s unprecedented address to Congress as a time to score political points, either on the right or left. The Pope’s primary agenda for this trip is not to give instructions on public policy, he observed, but a pastoral visit with and on behalf of his millions of American parishioners.

In the Pope’s address to Congress he alluded briefly to the Golden Rule and reminded us of our responsibility “to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.” We allies are compelled to follow the lead of those forward-thinking Catholics who urge us to take a time out from our reactivity. In Jon O’Brian’s words to, “embrace one another with pastoral hug” and begin our coalition work anew to secure the same reproductive justice for all women.

For more information on Catholics for Choice, go to [www.catholicsforchoice.com](http://www.catholicsforchoice.com).

September 28, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [catholics for choice](#), [interfaith](#), [pope visit](#), [uuwf](#)

## Death by a Thousand Cuts, a Thousand Lies

This is yet another blog about Planned Parenthood.



Full disclosure: When faced with my own need to make a decision about an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 19, I did not choose the option of abortion. And I doubt if I ever would have elected termination.

But that did not prevent me from (another full disclosure) going to work for a Planned Parenthood affiliate in California, one that offered a range of counseling and medical services, including abortion.

During my 12-year tenure, they added prenatal care and a case management program for pregnant and parenting teens, both of which I played a role in creating. My position required me to frequently respond to threats to our clinics from anti-choice picketers — which escalated at times into screaming harassment of the women coming to us at an already difficult time — as well as actual invasions and trespasses into waiting rooms. For years I wore a pager, ready most weekends to get in the car and help handle the situation, including media relations.

My own children witnessed some of this. My car was set ablaze, perhaps by these protesters, perhaps not. But at the time it happened, I was convinced that it was so.

I have not worked for Planned Parenthood for almost 25 years, moving on to head up a couple of child and family advocacy organizations, and then going into Unitarian Universalist ministry. But the organization has stayed in my head. It was so well and progressively run, with many opportunities for women's leadership in communities across the country, and with such a clarity of mission over its nearly 100 years. When I was acting as an advocate, we spoke about every child being a wanted child; we were pro-family and pro-choice. This is still true, and the mission statement has been expanded to empowering individuals and families to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

Planned Parenthood has stayed in my heart as the place I witnessed so many women and girls — and men — finding their way to our clinics in cities, suburbs and rural areas, with stories of economic and emotional distress, and then hope. I got to know the clinic workers, the nurse practitioners, the physician's assistants, the doctors who were faithful in their work despite public and private derision and constant, legitimate fears.

It was a world of relentless gotcha. There were constant accusations of misuse of funds, of profit-making, of blasphemy, of racially motivated genocide. We heard these allegations, saw the blown up pictures of bloody fetuses, were subject to megaphoned prayers about our sins. Even while we knew, and in the absolute observance of confidentiality never disclosed, that among those who condemned us were women who made their own choice to have abortions or family members who had decided that these particular situations were to be exempted from condemnation.

A quarter of a century ago — and further back to the beginnings of Planned Parenthood — there were dogged efforts to defund programs and shut the doors in the name of “pro-life.” To take away the federal and state dollars that helped pay for contraception and sexually transmitted disease services and other essential medical care and education. This, despite the fact that using these funds for abortion in most cases was barred early on.

No matter how many audits and studies, the gotcha went on and goes on.

The latest one is the release this summer of heavily edited video (analyzed as such by an intelligence company) by a group that calls itself the Center for Medical Progress, an anti-choice organization. These videos, recorded by two activists posing as representatives of a bogus biotechnology firm seeking (legally allowed) fetal tissue for researchers and universities, allegedly document that Planned Parenthood affiliates have profited cynically and illegally.

The videos — and the accusations of baby killing that go along with them — fail to acknowledge that these fetal donation programs, which assist those who wish to donate fetal tissue for research, have led to important advances in health treatment, such as vaccines for rubella and possible breakthroughs in the treatment of many other diseases.

In July, a letter was sent to Congress signed by 92 organizations who stand with Planned Parenthood as efforts are now being made — based on the inflammatory and distorted video content — to ban all federal funds going to these clinics, notably the loss of Title X family planning money. One of the arguments in the letter was that this targeting of Planned Parenthood, as I well know, is not new. There is a history of other “heavily edited videos, attempts at both the federal and state levels to undermine if not destroy this provider of reproductive health care, including many uninsured and under-insured people for whom Planned Parenthood is the only source they have for services.” A successful outcome of the attack, resulting in the destruction of this large family planning provider, would impact millions of people, most especially young people and people of color.

This gotcha needs to be exposed for what it is, just one more concerted campaign in a politically-motivated pattern of attempts on women’s personal decision making. It is a “death by a thousand cuts,” accomplished by the shameless perpetuation of a thousand falsehoods.

As UU women, we must stand up on the side of love and for reproductive choice and justice. In this climate that means standing up for Planned Parenthood.

September 4, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [abortion](#), [Blog](#), [planned parenthood](#), [reproductive justice](#)

## Following a Win for Human Rights



My husband and I have just recently returned from our annual summer travels, this time to Ireland – both the Irish Republic and North Ireland. It is just as lovely and green as we had read about in guide books. It is also an interesting study in human rights contrasts: specifically the disconnect between having just passed a referendum in May legalizing same sex marriage – the first ever in the world – while at the same time Ireland still has one of the most restrictive abortion policies, limiting legal access only to when the life of the woman is in danger.

Eight other nations had sanctioned legal same sex marriage prior to the Irish vote, but no other country had (or has) allowed and then won this change by popular vote. The vote was 62% favorable and, while definitely spurred on by shifting generational attitudes with places like Dublin attracting an especially youthful and diverse population, ultimately support for marriage equality was much more universal.

The pro-referendum murals and posters that are still up months after the vote reflect the passionate and accepting sensibility of a college-age citizenry. But the actual vote quite surprisingly cut across age and gender, geography and income, as a Reuters news story reported. Also surprising had been the strength of support for secular public policy, even despite opposition from the still powerful Roman Catholic Church.

This win for sexual human rights for gay and lesbian people – and its rebuke of theocracy – has not yet translated into an equally-energized effort to secure sexual human rights for women who would choose to end a pregnancy. This sobering incongruity has been noted by Colm O’Gorman, executive director of Amnesty International in Ireland, in an interview with Huffington Post’s Josh Zepps about a campaign to overturn Ireland’s 8th amendment, the one that so severely limits access to abortion.

He pointed out that this means there is no abortion in case of risk of health, or pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, or severe or fatal fetal anomalies. Which means, O’Gorman observed, that this country that has so boldly and proudly stood for marriage equality is in the meantime egregiously violating the rights of another group to determine their own futures as well.

He said that polls indicate that at least 81% of Irish residents want what he calls “a more expansive, human rights compliant abortion framework.” It is past time, he declared, to let the Irish people finally have their say on this issue.

What does this have to do with the human rights imperative for Unitarian Universalists?

We have witnessed – and joyfully celebrated – several years during which there appears to have been a welcome turning point in societal attitudes towards gays and lesbians, which does not mean that there is not still a great deal of work to do to secure equity and justice for GLBTQ people in arenas outside marriage. Still there is such a stunning gap in the arena of women’s rights, particularly around sexuality.

Can we move, as Amnesty International is moving, towards shining a blazing light on the human rights disparities that can exist, even as we laud progress in some corners of our culture and despair how stuck we seem to be in others? I believe there is room for – and the absolute need for – shared witness.

August 24, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [abortion](#), [Blog](#), [gay marriage](#), [human rights](#), [Ireland](#)



## [#Sayhername](#)



The 21-year-old white man, clad in black despite the June swelter, entered Emanuel AME church in Charleston and sat for a while silently observing a small group of African American congregants holding Wednesday night bible study. And then, according to news reports, almost an hour after he arrived, he stood and pulled out a gun.

When he was asked — when he was begged — not to shoot, he said he had to. “You are raping our women and taking over our country.” And he proceeded to open fire, then fled.

The first day they were just described as nine victims. All but the pastor, nameless. Nothing more said at least in major media outlets.

A tweet went out the day after: #sayhername and then another: #saytheirnames. So now we see their pictures posted and their genders and ages shared. So now we know their names, a little about who they were and who and what they loved, and how they will be missed. Six women, three men.

The first person that Dylann Roof took aim at was the oldest person present, a woman, **Susie Jackson**, age 87. She was a longtime church member and sang in the choir.

And there were five other black women who were massacred, whose names I will say, and write, and hope to remember:

**Depayne Middleton**, 49 — Doctor, mother of four daughters, an enrollment counselor at Southern Wesleyan University, working toward becoming a minister.

**Cynthia Hurd**, 54 — Manager of one of the busiest branches of the Charleston County Library system, looking forward to retirement after 31 years.

**Myra Thompson**, 59 — Wife of the vicar of a nearby Reformed Episcopal Church. She had traveled over to join the Emanuel study group.

**Ethel Lance**, 70 — A Charleston native who had been a member of that church for most of her life, serving as the sexton for the past six years. She had five children, seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, 45 — An administrator for the church, a high school speech therapist, and a girl's track and field coach. She had three children.

On this day I name them, and in the words of the poet Zelda:



Each of us has a name,  
given to us by God,  
and given to us by our father  
and mother.

Each of us has a name,  
given to us by our stature  
and our way of smiling,  
and given to us by our clothes.

Each of us has a name,  
given to us by the mountains,  
and given to us by our walls.

Each of us has a name,  
given to us by the planets,  
and given to us by our neighbors.

Each of us has a name,  
given to us by our sins,  
and given to us by our longing.

Each of us has a name,  
given to us by our enemies,  
and given to us by our love.

June 19, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog, charleston, sayhername, saytheirnames](#)

## The Feminist ‘Him’: A Panel of Male Perspectives



By Rev. Jonathan Rogers

In college, I went to a Take Back the Night march with some of my friends (mostly female) from our Students for a Democratic Society chapter. There was solemnity and sharing, but also passion and speeches; by the end of it we found ourselves worked up and ready to keep moving. So I followed the organizers on a continued march

around campus, holding signs and chanting slogans. We went to all the campus greens, and even into some dorms. In one of the dorms that many of the athletes lived in, a number of men came out into to hall to see what all the noise was. They had a range of reactions, but I remember someone asking “What the \*\*\*\* are the guys doing with them?”

All I could think to myself was, “what wouldn’t guys be doing with them?” I grew up a UU in a religion that taught me that my ideals as a male were not muscularity, but the universal ideals of justice, equity, and compassion. Thus, marching in solidarity with those who felt our campus was not a safe or equal place for them was natural, a given. But I’ve found that “duh” is not a crowd-pleasing answer when I’m asked why I identify as a male feminist. And I have found that my story is part of a vast and powerful array of male feminist voices. Despite their vastness and power, we nonetheless rarely enough hear from them in our movement. I remain very curious as to what other male-identified feminists have to say.

That curiosity was the impetus for a session that the Young Adults @ General Assembly (YA@GA) group will be hosting next month in Portland, called *The Feminist ‘Him’: A Panel of Male Perspectives*. This lay and clergy, multigenerational, multiracial, LGBTQ, female-moderated panel will provide a spectrum of answers to questions about how the male-identified individuals on it came to identify as feminists, what their experiences have been as such, and what those things mean for creating a more feminist faith movement. We live in a culture where many men ask “what’s the guy doing there” if they see a male-identified person at a sexual assault awareness march or a reproductive justice rally. Holding one’s ground as a male-identified feminist in that environment takes a sense of community and solidarity that we must continually work to build.

The panel is taking place Thursday, June 25th at 4:45pm in the YA@GA space during GA. We hope to see you there!

*As of August, Rev. Jonathan Rogers will be the Acting Associate Minister for Lifelong Learning and Growth at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. In haiku form, his beliefs are: ‘Universalist, process theologian and, feminist mystic.’*

June 9, 2015 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)

## A 50th Anniversary Celebration and Quite Possibly a New One



On June 7, 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that the marital right to privacy was guaranteed in the Constitution, and therefore it was no longer legal to criminalize the acts of informing about and providing contraception to couples. The SCOTUS decision was made in the context of a law suit brought by Estelle Griswold, medical director for Planned Parenthood in Connecticut, who had been found guilty, along with a colleague, as accessory in providing what were then illegal birth control devices.

Happy 50th anniversary. This ruling came to be applied to not only married people but also individual women (and men) who wanted to control their own fertility, with mixed but mostly good consequences. For decades now, females have been able to delay childbearing in order to finish schooling and launch careers; space their babies; and choose to be mothers or not, according to their own plans and desires. There have been health risks and health controversies as different methods have been more or less benign, more or less successful.

For those of us who wish abortion to be safe, available, and rare, access to birth control has been a key component. For others, many of them anti-choice activists, contraception has been almost as odious as pregnancy termination. So the legislative battles around reproductive choice have been on at least two fronts: fighting back efforts to water down or overturn legal abortion, and assuring legal contraceptive methods.

There has been so little good news lately—or, for that matter, going back several decades now—about moving forward in these arenas. This week's vote in the Oregon legislature feels like a cleansing rain storm in the midst of a long drought.

According to Reuters news service, a [law](#) requiring private insurers to allow women to collect a 12-month supply of birth control pills in a single visit, rather than a one month dose as often supplied, won unanimous approval by the state Senate this past Wednesday.

Another bill, allowing pharmacists to dispense these contraceptives directly without physician oversight, was passed in the House this week by a large majority and now heads to the Senate. Minors under 18 will still need a doctor's prescription to obtain chemical contraception.

“What we see in Oregon is unusual,” declared Elizabeth Nash, a policy analyst with the Guttmacher Institute, a policy center for family planning and abortion access. She observed that most U.S. states are moving toward restricting access to birth control rather than this kind of expansion, and no other state, she noted, requires insurance companies to pay for a 12-month supply—leading to fewer missed pills and less chance of unintended pregnancy.

Should these bills pass, Governor Kate Brown is expected to support them and sign them into law.

Those of us attending the UUA General Assembly in Portland, Oregon later this month might consider signing a thank you card to Gov. Brown—and the legislators—who will have given us such

rare and welcome cause for celebration. Especially as we finalize and vote on our own statement of conscience on reproductive justice.

June 5, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Campus Injustices and Summer Homework

Living near three college campuses—and our town high school—I am always very aware at this time of year that graduation is upon us. The side streets are jammed with overflow parking, the sidewalks are full of proud families and cap and gown wearing students.

My own class of 1970 at the University of California was denied a real-time ceremony in the Greek Theater, the first and last time ever. The war in Southeast Asia, especially the Cambodia invasion, had caused too much tension on campus—or so argued the administration—to risk a public gathering. So many agitated young people might use the occasion to continue the spirited protests that had marked my entire undergraduate tenure. Instead, our diplomas were mailed. We waited 20 years before being invited back in 1990 for a mock ceremony, and were then urged to join and donate generously to the alumnae association.



Last week, the Columbia University Class Day ceremony was the scene of a 2015-style protest; this time due to the school's handling of sexual assault. Senior Emma Sulkowicz crossed the stage carrying a mattress. She has been hauling it around campus until the fellow student she had accused of rape was no longer permitted there. Instead of being disciplined, her alleged attacker, Paul Nungesser, had been cleared of charges and

has filed a federal discrimination law suit against the school, citing harassment in the aftermath of the investigation.

Seemingly, President Lee C. Bollinger failed to shake her hand, which he had done with the other graduates. As reported by the *New York Times*, keynote speaker Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles acknowledged the slight, observing that student activists had taken risks and challenged hierarchy.

Campus rape has been big in the news this past year. The December 2014 issue of *Rolling Stone Magazine* carried a story about a freshman woman at the University of Virginia who said she had been brutally assaulted by seven men at a frat party. The article vividly described this particular case, as well as drawing attention to the campus rape problem nationwide. One in five women is sexually assaulted in college—most often during her freshman year—with only about 12 percent reporting it to police.

After the story was published, the adamant denial from UVA fraternities and others led to fact-checking. This revealed that, at the very least, contributor Sabrina Rubin Erdely had been sloppy in verifying allegations and, at most, had deliberately distorted the facts. The widely covered apology by the magazine was met with approval by those who felt that the school had been smeared, especially male students, and dismay by many who have been working on college safety reforms for females on campuses and feared the backlash.

However, a specific incident that has been seriously questioned on one campus does not negate the reality that women enrolled in colleges across the country face the possibility of what is also called “sexual intercourse without consent.” This is the most under-reported and under-prosecuted serious

crime in the nation,” writer Jon Krakauer notes in his latest book *Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town*.

In it, he tells the particular stories of several young female students at the University of Montana who are met with varying degrees of justice—or not—when they do come forward. He talks about allegations of a “feminist cabal” of hysterical, vindictive, deceptive university women making false accusations, even in light of the fact that there is less than 10 percent instance of false allegations. He describes a milieu in which an overwhelming majority of rapists go free, with less than six percent prosecuted and, of those convicted, less than three percent serving any jail time. An atmosphere in which the victims are met with suspicion, perpetrators with sympathy, and repeat offenders enabled to do so with “utter impunity.” He declares, following a careful examination of data and courtroom coverage of at least one campus sexual assault case, that rape is the only crime in which the victim is presumed to be a liar.

In 2014, the Obama Administration released the “Not Alone” report on campus safety for women, toughening the requirements under Title IX (a law outlawing sexual discrimination and violence in colleges receiving federal funds). Initially more than 50 were charged with violating federal laws around these complaints, including Harvard, UC Berkeley, Princeton, Boston University, and Michigan State. The number is now up to 90.

Summer reading for all of us, *Missoula* is a strong indictment of one college in particular and American campuses in general in their responses to campus rape and other forms of sexual battery.

Summer homework for institutions of higher education: Serious work on reworking or developing new plans which ensure safety for women.

May 28, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Standing Up: Planned Parenthood Style



Someday I will have the time, or take the time, to write an essay or sermon about how everything I know about being in an effective empowering and “mattering” organization I learned in my time working as a director of government and community relations for Planned Parenthood. It is so true. But today I am focusing on a line in a message published in the program of the annual Living Legends Gala, which Planned Parenthood(PP)

Southeast held this year in the Georgia Aquarium with sharks and fish species swimming by, keeping their watch on the 400 people gathered there.

In a joint statement by their energetic (and very funny) President Staci Fox and board chair Melinda Cooper Holladay, they thanked their donors, volunteers, and staff for “always standing up, being brave and caring, no matter what.” *No matter what*. And this year the “no matter what” has been, as always, wave after wave of legislation and court decisions undermining the reproductive freedom gains of the past, continuing familiar and discouraging chips away of true access and true choice.

Just this week the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that a *New York Times* editorial declared “bogus.” The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act that asserts that “an unborn child is capable of experiencing pain at least by 20 weeks after fertilization.” Medical evidence does not support this.

This ban on abortions after 20 weeks only make exceptions if the mother’s life is endangered—not her health—or for rape victims who have received counseling or medical care at least 48 hours before the procedure. It does not allow for terminations for fetal abnormalities, some of which are not tested for or detectable until later in a pregnancy.

Along with 32 other faith-based organizations, the UU Women’s Federation signed on to a letter to House members opposing this piece of legislation. In it, we opposed what we see as a ban on abortion care based on arbitrary gestational limits, “that would block a woman’s access to safe health care and deny her the ability to make decisions according to her own beliefs and conscience.” We called on the people representing us in Congress to reinforce and not erode the religious values that guide our organization’s compassion, support, and respect for a woman and her family facing this decision and to provide safe and legal access to whatever care she feels is necessary and best in her situation.

Besides medical conditions affecting both the woman and fetus, this includes difficulty in traveling to clinics—made even more likely now in places like Texas that have placed formidable, in fact mostly impossible, strictures on the clinics which used to provide these procedures. The barriers also include mandated waiting periods and insurance limitations.

These kinds of measures have been introduced and re-introduced in the decades since *Roe V. Wade*, and this one will most likely be either defeated in the Senate or vetoed by the President.

Still they come and come and take so much time and energy to combat.



No matter what Planned Parenthood, both nationally and on the local level, keeps focused on the mission. To expand access to health care. To provide medically accurate sex education. To advocate for the reproductive rights of all people. They do it by serving thousands of clients, offering education outreach, and encouraging activism.

The mission of the UUWF is to advance justice for women and girls, and to promote their spiritual growth. PP holds what they call “mission-driven” events to promote and affirm their purpose. What might we do as *we* stand up, be brave and caring, no matter what?

May 15, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog, no matter what, pain-capable, planned parenthood, unborn children protection](#)

## [Mama's Day Justice \(and Peace\)](#)



A few weeks back, I had my husband put in an explicit request to my three grown children for this Mother's Day. I asked for pictures of my three young grandchildren, not Facebook-posted ones or Flickr for a change: printed out ones in frames, no matter how simple. They will be added to the gallery on our dining room side table, a visual chronicle of a family that has gone from one ethnicity and faith tradition to a multi-cultural, interfaith one in two generations of Americans.

I did not ask for a Hallmark card, not seeing the appeal, but I would not be averse to receiving a [Mama's Day](#) card, a line of contemporary ones portraying the wonderful variety of strong families out there. I would not be averse to a bunch of flowers or some trinket or another, or a virtual brunch (with my progeny scattered all over the country and the world now). But I am right there with UU Julia Ward Howe who, in her Mother's Day proclamation, called for disarmament and peace—pleading for an end to the training of any woman's son to injure another.

I wore "Another Mother for Peace" t-shirts when my oldest children were little, joining others in demanding an end to the Vietnam War, and have worn a "Grandmother for Peace" shirt as other conflicts we don't choose to call wars roll out, one after another. This is what I still want for my children and now their children. And I want so much more.

For many years I labored in the field—the battlefield—of what we called reproductive choice, mobilizing my sibling citizens to protect the legal rights to contraception and abortion that the generation of women and men before me thought they had secured. The right to choose to be a mother or not. In my years as an advocate with a large Planned Parenthood affiliate, and as a young (some would say too young) mother, I very soon viewed "choice" as going well beyond clinical services and legislation that would safeguard the spacing of children and/or the decision not to parent. I saw many women and not-quite women, low income and mostly of color, wanting to have children, to have families that were not cut and pasted out of an episode of Donna Reed. The obstacles were almost overwhelming—lack of access to prenatal care, housing, fair wages, leave time, and childcare—let alone the judgments that followed them when they chose to continue pregnancies.

Much of the work I did, along with coalitions of others, was what we now are calling Reproductive Justice. In the words of Sistersong—one of our partners in the current UU study action initiative—ensuring the right to have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. Based on the human right to make personal decisions about one's life, this framework enlarges the context by asking us to look at the economic and racial factors, the systems of either equity or inequity, that impact what we too often have looked at as only a personal decision-making process.

My daughter is in the middle of an endangered, high-risk pregnancy; one that has already involved an emergency appendectomy and now a uterine complication that may well lead to a very early delivery and even a threat to her own life. Her situation is frightening and stressful. However, should her baby be born prematurely—which is likely—she is fortunate to have the health insurance and other means (including proximity to hospitals that have very specialized maternal surgery teams and

neonatal units) that give her the best possible chance of having a healthy baby and recovery from childbirth.

Not so for too many other women. One out of every nine babies is born premature in the U.S., a disproportionate number of these African American. On average, black women are about 60% more likely to deliver early compared to white women. The data on other women of color also indicates a disparity, with Latino and Native American babies arriving in higher percentages than the children of white mothers.

A fact sheet put out by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) maintains that the “reasons for the difference between black and white women (delivering premature) remains unknown and an area of intense research.”

On the contrary, in an article written in 2013 for *The Root*, Jannell Ross cited a pair of Emory University studies that connected the large share of African American children born before term with the biologically detectable effects of stress created in women’s bodies after decades of dealing with American racism.

“Racism is an incredibly powerful force,” said Elizabeth Corwin, dean of research at Emory University’s Woodruff School of Nursing.

Including its impact on when an African American child is born.

This Mama’s Day I wish, as always, for peace, and also for reproductive justice. We have the opportunity as UUs to make this happen for generations ahead.

*Rev Marti Keller is the affiliated minister with the UU Women’s Federation. Prior to her ordination, she was director of government and community relations for Planned Parenthood Shasta-DeSoto in California and executive director of two statewide child and family advocacy organizations. She serves on the coalition council for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.*

May 8, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#), [mama's day](#), [mother's day](#), [reproductive justice](#)

## No Choices



I returned a few days ago from 10 days in San Miguel De Allende Mexico, a town which was turned into an American and Canadian arts and culture tourist mecca and now a thriving ex pat community some years back, due to the opening of an art school. Nowadays there are Spanish-language academies, writers workshops, alternative healing centers and spas, and an all-year-round Unitarian Universalist fellowship that meets weekly in a gracious hotel.

The view from the hall is stunning, and there are sounds of children playing, Catholic church bells ringing and bustling street noises.

This UU community has never had regular paid ministers, attracting clergy and speakers from all over with the promise (kept) of ample places to explore, amazing meals, and scenic beauty. Instead, the fellowship donates over half its budget to starting and sustaining local not for profit groups and much of their human capital as well.

I was not able to join members in the campo — the rural countryside outside the city limits — where poverty abounds. Here, they tutor, mentor, support, build, practice the language, learn about culture, navigate differences.

While I was in San Miguel, I led a morning program on reproductive justice, based on the excellent curriculum created during her UUWF Clara Barton internship by Jessica Halperin, now a policy associate for the Unitarian Universalist Association. A group of women and men, most of them UUs, a few of them from the greater community, met at the Jewish Community and Cultural Center there, to learn about the timeline for reproductive choice and be introduced to the relatively new paradigm of reproductive justice. Which, simply put, means the right to decide whether and when to have children PLUS social justice, equal access to the supports and environments necessary to genuine choice.

The picture in much of the developing and developed world is even less just.

In Mexico and especially in the Guanajuato state in which San Miguel sits, the legal right to abortion is extremely restricted. A few years back, the federal district of Mexico City liberalized their laws to allow abortion in the first 12 weeks. Other states allow a procedure in cases of rape only. In Guanajuato, not even maternal endangerment is considered grounds for a legal abortion. If a woman obtains an abortion in Mexico City and it is discovered, she can be prosecuted once she returns home.

Illegal abortions are of course common, and 36 percent of them end up with complications.

Without the core right to, and access to, means of securing a safe abortion (many women use abortion inducing pills), choice is really no choice at all.

As non-citizens, as long-term outsiders, our resident UUs cannot lobby inside their adopted (or semi adopted) country to liberalize laws that are so heavily influenced by the Catholic Church and others.

Instead, UUs in Mexico work with the locals to do the surrounding significant reproductive justice work: encouraging education of girls; enhancing the lives of the children already born; building awareness around domestic violence and sexual assault. They do what they can.

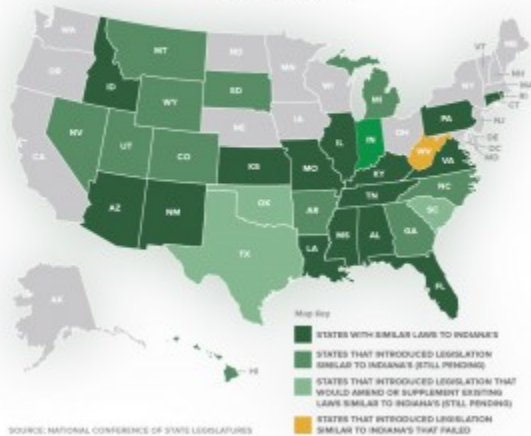
I came away with admiration for the uphill work that is being done inside Mexico by its own citizens to overcome these draconian strictures with determination and dignity, and the role our own movement is playing, along with many other faith communities, in allying for eventual change. It also made me even more committed to staying the course in this country, not allowing fatigue or even indifference to enable the continual erosion of those basic protections we thought we had secured for good and all.

April 17, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## What We Don't Yet Know For Sure (in the name of religious freedom)

U.S. States with Religious Freedom Restoration Acts  
and/or Legislation Similar to Indiana's

AS OF MARCH 2015



This past week, the state legislatures in two states, Indiana and Arkansas, approved so-called “religious objections” laws. These types of legislation (previously passed by 18 states) are ostensibly based on the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, which was the effort of a coalition of groups, many of them progressive, to ensure that individuals and their faith traditions were protected from inadvertent discrimination, especially religious minorities.

The federal law was in play last year when the US Supreme Court ruled on the so-called Hobby Lobby case argued before it, that “closely held” corporations have the same basic rights of

religious belief, allowing businesses to assert their faith positions by opting out, for example, of providing free contraceptive coverage under the Affordable Care Act if they found it objectionable.

In both recent state battles over proposed legislation loosely mirroring the federal statute, vociferous and effective opposition has been focused on the very real threat to gays and lesbians, even more acutely in these states which offer no constitutional protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

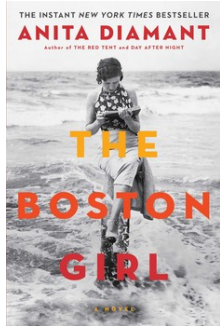
Upon signing by the Governor, there was immediate backlash, first in Indiana and then Arkansas (where WalMart executives have asked for the law to be amended to make clear that discrimination against gays and lesbians will not be allowed). But as far as I can tell, the potential for damage to the reproductive rights of women and girls has not been the subject of outrage, let alone education on the potential harm. If language is indeed added that would thwart the threat under these laws to GLBTQ persons and these bills are signed into law, there is no assurance that “religious objections” won’t be used to deny access to contraception or other goods, services, and status that are disapproved by a business or individual.

My policy colleagues in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice have not had the bandwidth to do the kind of analysis necessary to pinpoint the instances and conclusively support the suspicion that on the state level in the name of one person’s faith, another’s human rights — in this case the legal rights to choice in becoming pregnant or having a baby — may be compromised. There’s no reason to think otherwise.

Let’s hope that the righteous furor around these unnecessary and insidious bills will slow down the rush to sign them into law, giving us more of a chance to add our voices to the resounding NO.

April 2, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## How 1965 turned out to be a landmark year (and an embarrassing discovery)



In *The Boston Girl*, the latest novel by Anita Diamant (author of *The Red Tent*), in a chapter titled “I figure God created Margaret Sanger, too,” the lead character Addie Baum’s friend Filomena attempts a self-induced abortion by using bleach. A French-Canadian nurse in their neighborhood saves her from dying and completes the procedure. In the parlance of the 1900’s in America, she has “lost” a baby, the stuff of cruel rumors and threats that, because she had terminated the pregnancy, she would be denied burial in the Jewish cemetery upon her own passing.

One of the women who gather around the weak but recovering young woman reveals that her own mother “had five babies in six years and died giving birth to the last one, who died too.”

There’s a way to keep this from happening, she declares. She has a pamphlet about it and she is going to loan it out.

How she got hold of this how-to-prevent-pregnancy information — with the devices available at that time — is not described. What we do know, is that this was considered indecent, even pornographic material. Under the Comstock Law, a federal act passed by Congress in 1873, the mailing of literature about contraceptives and abortifacients, let alone the actual items, was forbidden. In Washington D.C. and other places where the deferral government had jurisdiction, selling, giving away, or having in one’s possession these banned materials was a misdemeanor, and could lead to a hefty fine or even imprisonment of not less than six months.

Half of the states passed similar, so-called anti-obscenity laws which deemed pregnancy prevention efforts within their borders as without redeeming social importance under contemporary community standards.

Meticulously retold in the engaging new book on *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution* by reporter Jonathan Eig, Margaret Sanger witnessed many such dangerous efforts to terminate unwanted pregnancies when she worked for a visiting nurse service connected with a New York City settlement house. As Eig describes her experiences, “she watched women die because their bodies could not hold up against the strain of producing so many babies under such poor conditions, or because they used primitive birth control devises that caused infection, or because butchers posing as abortionists botched their jobs.”

In the following years, Sanger and her first husband William Sanger were arrested under New York law for disseminating contraceptive information, opening a birth control clinic in Brooklyn, and in 1932 for mailing a shipment of diaphragms from Japan. They won an appeals court decision that struck down federal government barriers. It had taken 18 years of blatant disobedience and legal trials.



In 1965, there were still “Comstock” laws on the book in a few states, including Connecticut, which prohibited the use of drugs or instruments to prevent conception and even giving assistance or counsel in their use. These laws had been written in 1879, in fact penned by one of our famous own Universalists, the circus owner P.T. Barnum, who was also a Republican legislator. He justified authoring and working to pass this law as consistent with his Universalism, saying “a human soul that God created and Christ died for is not to be trifled with.” Which meant not interfering with pregnancy, intended or not.

As Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, had done earlier in the century, Estelle Griswold, executive director of the PP League of Connecticut, and medical director Dr. C. Lee Buxton provided the test case, offering themselves up for arrest. They were found guilty as accessories in providing illegal contraception. Their conviction was upheld by the Connecticut Supreme Court, and appealed to the US Supreme Court.

On **March 29, 1965**, arguments were heard and considered, including the fundamental right to privacy in marital relations.

Like so many other cases, both infamous and groundbreaking, the decision was not made public until June.

Most of us already know the outcome, which has had an impact well beyond the misdemeanor verdict upon which “Griswold vs. Connecticut” was based.

So much has come of it.

March 26, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Why Male Allies?



Harold McNaron

Many thanks to Rev. Marti for granting me access to this space. I'm Portland, OR-based cisgender white male UU in pursuit of solidarity with folks of other genders, races and target identities. In her invitation, Rev. Marti asked me to write about the need for or usefulness of male allies. My working definition for a male ally is a male-identified person intentionally working in partnership with women and folks of other genders to challenge sexism and interlocking systems of oppression.

One caveat: depending on the situation, maybe a male ally isn't needed. For real. Regardless of our positive intent, sometimes, [as Amanda Hess says](#), we're the worst. Even when we're not the worst, sometimes we're not what's needed. For instance, when the Portland-based Men Engaging Now produced a white paper documenting challenges and opportunities related to engaging men in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault response work, they noted that "men have earned women's skepticism and distrust" and while "many female abuse survivors do not experience generalized fear of men," it is essential that male allies honor the boundaries set by survivors. Thus male allyship can only work when it's done in partnership with women and folks of other genders.

### 2 Reasons for Male Allies

1. **Sexist men are more likely to listen to other men.** It's hurtful for me to acknowledge this, as I know some small part of the pain this causes the women in my life. Yet, if I accept that the primary work of a male ally is to utilize my gender privileges to subvert and challenge sexism, then working with men of unexamined privilege is a primary way to do so. This kind of intervention can look like something as small as ([what Ngọc Loan Trần terms](#)) *calling IN* someone who unintentionally uses trans-exclusive language or something as big as [working with abusive men to account for and begin to repair the harm they've caused](#). To be clear, this tactic does not give male allies license to take up even more space and time in social settings. Rather, it encourages us to support the work of other feminists by pointing to or presenting the brilliant counternarratives y'all offer. This intervention is male allies' response to the call, from folks of various target identities, for us to "get our people."
2. **Because our liberation is tied up with yours.** It's the [indigenous scholar's truth](#). It's the 7th UU principle. It's even a stage in our male identity development process! As men who benefit from the same sexism that oppresses folks of other genders, we have a very human need to explore and align ourselves with feminism, Black Feminism, gender justice and related ways of knowing. We are not oppressed by sexism, but it does do us harm by separating us from family members and friends in dangerous ways. Thus we men need feminism just as much or more than feminism needs us.

What are your reasons for or challenges around male allyship?

March 19, 2015 / [Guest Blogger](#) / [Blog](#)

## **“Justice for all just ain’t specific enough.”**

*From **Glory** by John Legend and Common*



This Oscar-winning song from the movie “Selma” was used to frame the many conversations that took place at the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) council meeting I attended in Washington DC this week. The focus of much of this was how we could most effectively and respectfully be faith-based allies with the groups of women of color across the country that have been pursuing reproductive justice for many years now. Reproductive Justice, it has come to be understood, is work that fights against all of the cultural, political, economic and structural restraints, that limit

women’s access to healthcare and full reproductive choice. To seek comprehensive social justice for women and girls; and in doing so, secure the right of all women to have children, not to have children, and to raise their children in a safe and healthy environment.

It is still about continuing to fight back efforts to restrict access to contraception and abortion, and it is now more than ever also about combating the many other ways in which women can be blocked in having the final say about pregnancy.

The priority commitment for UUWF to focus on reproductive justice has led us to sign on to numerous letters and petitions to our elected officials on pertinent issues outside what we have commonly understood as reproductive rights. Under this expanded definition, we have opposed the cynical strategy, in the guise of religious liberty, that would enable companies and local governments to deny covering medical procedures and other services should they offend a particular religious sensibility, or refuse to employ people whose lifestyle (GLBTQ, single parenthood) that may be in violation of a particular set of beliefs.

In recent months, we have also weighed in on better reporting of and processes for stopping sexual assault in the military; on the culture of rape and its poor policing on college campuses; on drug-testing for food stamp recipients and the chilling impact it may have on seeking prenatal care, and coming up wholeheartedly supporting the FAMILY ACT, which calls for a national policy of paid family and medical leave insurance.

We’re not stretching too thin. We are in fact stretching our understanding of what specifically hinders or helps women’s lives.

### **Torpedoing Aid to Sex Trafficking Victims**

In the course of our gathering in DC, my RCRC council colleague Reverend Susan Burton, who does advocacy for women and children for the United Methodist Church, gathered signatures for an urgent letter to our Senators urging them to oppose a bill — as it stands now — that would establish a fund for trafficking victims, paid into by the convicted perpetrators. This previously bipartisan

legislation has been amended with a provision that specifically prohibits any of the money being used for abortion.

While federal law has long prohibited the use of budgeted funds for abortion except in very limited circumstances, this would be a crippling new twist on such a ban: instead of the annually-voted-on budget provision, this injunction — except for rape, incest or maternal endangerment — would be permanent. And it would now additionally extend to this privately financed fund.

Our Senators need to hear from us with a message that commends their humanitarian focus on the many victims of enslavement while urging them to remove the mean spirited and unnecessary anti-choice language.

March 12, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## You Don't Own Us



Confession: one of my favorite pop music genres is the girl groove, those all- female groups and soloists that hit their peak in the 1960's. On one of those public television pledge nights a while back, we were treated to dozens of fading video tapes of those Detroit , New York, and Nashville female vocalists who I had stayed up listening to on the bubble gum AM radio stations of my California pre-teen years.

Some of them were minor stars, even one hit wonders, and others like The Supremes dominated the charts for many years with their songs of one way love and rejection. Their stories of leaders of the pack and soldier boys. Their advice to those of us who dreamed of being Bobby's girl: that just to see his smile made our life worthwhile.

My favorite was probably "The End of the World" by Skeeter Davis, a minor star with her medium looks and Southern twang singing soulfully about her lost boy friend, the one who didn't love her anymore. She asked why the sun went on shining the birds singing, the stars glowing above, the sea rushing to shore, her heart beating, her eyes crying. One guy had said goodbye and it was all over for her at 16 or 17. I had not even had a date yet, and I was totally relating to her doomed future and her unending pain.

Listening again 50 years later to the five volume retrospective Girl Grooves CD set I was sent in exchange for an upped annual contribution to my local station, confirmed for me that the music itself was good. These were infectious songs: danceable, listenable, covered by (mostly) top notch performers. That many of the lyrics preached such adulation, such willingness to do whatever it took to please those gangly, pimply boys, is undeniable. That these hit songs have staying power in artistic ways and at least gave young women musicians a platform for fleeting fame is also true.

One of the luminaries among these died last month.

The Brooklyn-born, New Jersey raised Lesley Gore, nee Goldstein, was only 16 years old when she was discovered by Quincy Jones and began recording, starting with "It's My Party" and other treacly tunes that sold millions of copies. It wasn't until she released " You Don't Own Me, written by a male songwriting duo, which urged her peers not to become "little toys," told what to say and do, and put on display, that her own voice emerged.

This song was the first in a series of break-aways for the singer, choosing to go to Sarah Lawrence College as a "normal" student, coming out as a lesbian, using the words and overall message of "You Don't Own Me" in a public service ad urging young women to exercise their vote, calling for equal rights and especially reproductive justice.

Lesley died of lung cancer at age 68, survived by Lois Sasson, her partner of 30 years.

Says Sasson: "She was a wonderful human being — caring, giving, a great feminist, great woman, great human being, and great humanitarian." Indeed. <http://www.upworthy.com/a-bevy-of-famous-ladies-sing-along-to-this-50-year-old-classic-wow-this-song-is-magic>

March 5, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## A Mixed Oscar Moment



Patricia Arquette

For me, the high point of the overall tedious Academy Awards show this year was Lady Gaga channeling Julie Andrews in her 50th anniversary tribute to the release of *The Sound of Music*. She was nothing short of amazing, demonstrating her classical voice training and her love of American musical theater. It was pure entertainment, soaring and joyous.

Using this hugely viewed ceremony as a platform to draw attention to issues, Oscar winners talked about ALS, Alzheimer's disease, and government invasion into the private lives of citizens and the status of Mexicans in their own country and as immigrants in the United States.

And there was Best Supporting Actress recipient Patricia Arquette, who read from prepared thank you remarks, which in addition to the usual shout outs to family and fellow cast members, included a plea for "wage equality once and for all. And equal rights for women in the United States of America." At the moment she finished this sentence, the cameras panned on actresses Meryl Streep and Jennifer Lopez, who nearly leapt from their seats in support of her statement.

Even these few words have drawn some sharp critique, for example in the Vent column in our local daily newspaper from a reader who responded: "Sorry, Hollywood ladies, no sympathy here. If you don't think you're paid enough for a role, hold out for more or turn it down. But please stop whining while the rest of us are struggling."

Background. While major Hollywood stars, male and female, are pulling in millions of dollars per movie, a hack into and then leak of Sony Pictures e-mails last year disclosed that A-list actresses Amy Adams and Jennifer Lawrence were paid less than their male co-stars for the film "*American Hustle*." The Wall Street Journal subsequently reported (Feb. 23) that women in the entertainment industry earn 85% as much as men, only slightly better than American women in other jobs, who last year made 82.5 cents for every dollar paid male workers.

The Journal published Labor Department data which showed that while the widest gap in weekly earnings are in law, with women bringing in 56.7% of what men earn, "gaps are found in nearly every profession, ranging from chief executive (70%) to food preparation (90.5%)."

In the same article, Brookings Institution economist Gary Burtless observed "I have never seen anyone who has done a fair-minded study who fails to see there's a residual amount of discrimination against women."

However, it was Arquette's off-the-cuff remarks backstage at the Oscars that have caused far more negative reactions. Expanding on the need for equal wages and other rights, she called for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing equal rights (the ERA campaign many years back failed when it went to states for ratification), urging "all women in America and all the men who love women and all gay people and people of color that we've all fought for to fight for us now."

It was the last part of this comment that has distressed those of us who are working for justice and equity for all women and girls, ignoring and diminishing the rights of women of color and non-straight women, disenfranchising them from our common struggle.

This is what the Unitarian Universalist Association [study and action initiative on reproductive justice](#) is all about: including all women in our work, as well as welcoming male allies.

February 26, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## Oscars and Monochrome

I spent the first half of my adult vocational life as a professional arts and culture reporter and columnist. As such, I got much of my understanding of our American society and the world at large from live actors on stages and from movie screens in darkened theaters.



Director Ava DuVernay

My academic preparation and experience spending so much of my time in these places made for an almost entirely white male underpinning, from Shakespeare and O’Neil to Orson Welles and Francis Ford Coppola. As a thirtysomething, I organized one Sunday afternoon gathering for women in local theater at my home overlooking the San Francisco Bay. Over chardonnay and pepper jack cheese, we plotted not so much a complete overthrow but at least a modest incursion into this one gender club: a revolution that lasted as long as the wine and crackers. We all went back into the tedium of just trying to keep our toehold as female actors, not directors; critics for small weeklies, not the union dailies.

That was more than three decades ago.

Sunday night is the Academy Awards: the last in this season of trophy nights for movie makers. One of my Facebook — and actual — colleagues wrote a post the other day asking what her online friends were going to do in lieu of watching this “boring” three hour red carpet extravaganza and celeb fest. A few said they were going out to dinner on an evening when reservations to favorite restaurants could be scored. Or turn to Downton Abbey on public television as it canters predictably to the end of a fifth hit season.

I admitted with no shame at all that the Oscars are my Super Bowl, without the salsa and tortilla chips and beer. And I am of course not alone, as millions if not nearly billions of viewers in almost every country tune in, either in front of their own televisions or in bars and other public places. I can’t remember ever missing them, and mostly staying up for the Best Picture category all those many hours later.

The run-up hype to these awards has seemed earlier, and the coverage around them more contentious this season, with understandable cries of dismay as the film *Selma* was bypassed in almost every category, depriving a gifted black female director and several black actors of even a shot at the prizes. It is an especially monochromatic line-up of contenders, following what appeared to be real progress in the past few years.

And then there are the other women.

The New York Times movie reviewer A.O. Scott has observed, “the American film industry continues to marginalize creative women and strew obstacles in their paths.” This critic noted that every movie nominated for best picture, best director and best screenplay is male with male focused stories, and that this year’s crop of movies about girls and women was blatantly ignored. While “Wild,” based on the memoir by Cheryl Strayed, which documented her long-distance hike across the Pacific Rim Trail, received best actress (Reese Witherspoon) and supporting actress (Laura

Dern) nominations, it was shut out of the categories recognizing the overall excellence of the work. “Belle,” about a young black woman in slave-era England was doubly overlooked.

Nonetheless, there I will be come Sunday, in a recliner, scorecard in hand. Hopeful that next year in Hollywood . . .

February 19, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Standing Our Ground: Reproductive Justice for Marissa Alexander



Guest Blog by Monica Simpson, executive director of SisterSong.

“The over-policing and over-criminalization of pregnant women and mothers is becoming a major issue in this country, and the safety of mothers is at stake.” [Read Monica’s Message...](#)

This week’s UUWF justice and equity blog, usually written by affiliated minister Rev. Marti Keller, was written last April by Monica Simpson, the executive director of our partner organization, SisterSong.

This national group was founded by women of color to re-frame the reproductive choice and reproductive rights movement into a reproductive justice crusade. This work has, in Monica’s own words “stretched beyond the narrow focus on legal access ... to a broader analysis of racial, economic and structural constraints” on the power and ability of women to protect their bodies, families and lives.

Marissa Alexander, a 34 year old Florida woman, was convicted of aggravated assault after firing a warning shot in the air to ward off her abusive estranged husband.

Her plea of standing her ground in the face of life-threatening abuse, was not accepted. She spent three years behind bars and was just released on house arrest on Jan. 27.

As Monica wrote last year, Alexander’s case is “the epitome of a reproductive justice issue,” an example of the human rights violations against and punitive treatment of pregnant women and mothers in many of our communities.

UUWF stands in solidarity with SisterSong in continuing to lift up these injustices.

[Read Monica’s Message...](#)

February 5, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## False Victory



As a former daily reporter and columnist, I was quite used to having to pull and rewrite stories on tight deadlines because the situation had changed. An arrest had been made, a source had been located, new facts had appeared. I am old enough to have been a journalist, albeit a young college student, when newspapers were still put together in linotype: copy written on half sheets of cheap brown paper and metal characters used to prepare the final edition for print. It was a cumbersome process, and when changes were made in the hours before deadline, our cranky machine operators were known to swear mightily at

whatever editor let them know to hold the presses.

These days of course, and for many years, we have composed on computers and it has been much easier to recompose our work and rework a piece that would be wrong if published the way it was originally submitted.

I thought about this today when I faced the task of tossing the blog I had put together a few days ago (at least in my head) about a letter that the UUWF had signed on to, along with the UUA and other progressive religious groups and women's rights organizations, protesting the anticipated vote on of a bill in the House of Representatives that would ban almost all abortions after 20 weeks. Only a few exceptions would be allowed, including for pregnancies resulting from rape, but only if previously reported, and for minors 16 and under who are the victims of incest.

From my own years working in close proximity with Planned Parenthood clinics, I know that there are crucial medical and painful ethical reasons, with just a very small percentage of all abortions being performed well into the second trimester. This kind of legislation flies in the face of private decision-making on the part of a woman and her doctor. The choice to call a vote on the bill this past week seemed a political move made to please and placate anti-choice protestors gathered, as they always are, in Washington D.C. to mark the 1973 Roe v Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion nationwide, by once again demanding its overturn.

Opponents of the bill, in addition to generally expressing disapproval of yet another attempt to chip away at safe and legal abortion, pointed out that only 35 percent of rapes and sexual assaults are ever reported to the police — thus depriving many women who were attacked and made pregnant from being able to terminate these pregnancies. And that the arbitrary maximum age for allowing incest victims an exception was just that: illogical and inexplicable.

In the hours before an anticipated House vote, the proposed legislation was pulled, partly due to the objections of some Republicans, including female members of Congress. In the immediate aftermath of this decision, pro-choice advocates celebrated the turn-around as an indication that perhaps some reason is being restored in the face of what one newspaper editorial is calling a perilous year ahead for reproductive justice, with no let-up at all in the attacks on individual childbearing decisions.

Among the bills already proposed in Congress is one that would deny federal funds for any group that provides abortions, with its main target yet again being Planned Parenthood.

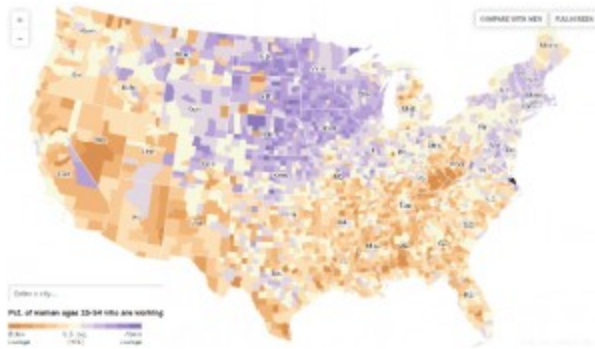
Unfortunately, those of us who would like to be able to exhale instead of holding our collective breaths in anticipation of yet another salvo in the escalating war on women and girls had relaxed too soon. As the annual March for Life continued on the capitol mall, by a near party line vote, the House voted to permanently restrict federal funds for most abortion coverage (the so called Hyde amendment is currently part of the federal budget and voted on yearly.) It would also block tax credits for people and employers who purchase abortion coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Following the vote, President Obama reiterated his commitment to upholding reproductive choice, stating that the bill just passed in the House would intrude on women's reproductive freedom and health care, and unnecessarily restricts the private insurance options that consumers have today.

The president deserves our thanks, while we, unfortunately, must remain more vigilant than ever in defense of hard won rights and even more sweeping reproductive justice in the future.

January 24, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The Good and Bad News about Female Employment



The end of the year 2014 federal numbers showed unemployment being 5.3 percent, which normalizes this figure after years of recovery from the most recent Great Recession. Which is a good thing.

Further analysis of the non-employed, compiled by David Leonhardt in the [January 6 “Upshot,”](#) a New York Times special feature, reveals real

variances between men and women in the nature of their responses to the loss of work, and the distinct geography of female employment. Some of the differences are good, some disturbing, some inexplicable.

Based on his research, men in general have a tougher emotional time riding out periods of not working: exercising less and experiencing worse relationships with their family members in the face of having more time to spend with them. Women, he wrote, report improved dealings with family and friends since they stopped working.

In this economy, women may adjust better to job loss, but this benign indicator is more than countered by the clear statistics that while the numbers of women in the workplace increased at the end of the 20th century, driven in part by the feminist movement, this upward trend has been reversed since 2000. Which is in direct contrast to other wealthier developed countries, where rates have continued to rise.

For both male and female workers, the places of lowest levels of employment correlate with some of the most challenging places to live: Appalachia, Northern Michigan, the Deep South and the interior Southwest, all areas of high poverty and often bleak living conditions. But, as the reporter noted, female working patterns are more nuanced than males.

In places like Utah and other Mormon areas, and then areas like the upper Eastside of Manhattan, not poor or unusually physically challenging locations, female employment rates are relatively low, with local cultures that promote stay-at-home full-time mothering. In several census tracts, the unemployment rate for prime-age women in Salt Lake City is as high as the rates in the 1950's.

In other places, like New England and the Upper Midwest, female employment rates are robust, as well as in lower income areas in the middle of the country. Higher levels of education among women vs. men account for this.

What is your experience of geographic incentives or barriers to women working in this country? How are you engaged in equity of employment in your community?

Let me know, and I will report back. E-mail me at [minister@uuwf.org](mailto:minister@uuwf.org).

January 14, 2015 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Focusing On the Good



The end of every year brings with it lists. Lists of the best movies, best albums, best books, and best television series.

My blog is not a “best of,” but rather an ongoing attempt to capture the good, bad, and mixed developments in the status of women and girls. To what extent do we see more justice and equity? To what degree have we lost ground?

This is not a comprehensive inventory, rather the gleanings from a practice I learned in theology school called findings. Taken from a daily practice developed by African American minister Howard Thurman, spiritual adviser to Dr. Martin Luther King Junior and beloved by Unitarian Universalists, it involves sitting with the morning papers, scissors in hand, in search of articles and columns that speak to us. Does it further our compassion? Does it illuminate our longings?

Does it speak truths to power that move us to further reflection and then action?

By December, my colored file folders are crammed with clippings, sorted and resorted as each reading brings new angles and insights. They form the basis for this round up of legal rulings, legislation, and events that either benefited or further devastated the lives of females in this country:

And just for today, I have chosen to focus on the good.

### **The Good:**

A 12-year-old female little league player captured the hearts of the crowds at this year’s Little League championship, overcoming the great odds that girls who love this game can ever get this far.

Lego has reissued the Research Institute, aimed at female Lego scientists.

*Frozen*, a movie centered around two untypical fantasy princesses, has broken all box office records and generated millions of dollars in branded merchandise sales, a game changer for the male-dominated film industry.

In a generally discouraging midterm election year, two bright spots were the ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage that passed in four deep red states: Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, and in other jurisdictions non-binding measures calling for a raise. About two thirds of all workers being paid minimum wage are women.

Another positive election result was the overwhelming rejection of fetal “personhood” measures in Colorado and North Dakota, following the defeat of a similar measure in Mississippi three years ago.

The just-passed federal spending bill contained language that, at least, grants women in the Peace Corps the same very limited access to abortion funding that others have. It also contains \$41 million



for testing rape kits, in hopes of easing or eliminating the tremendous backlog and therefore the availability of crucial evidence.

A stringent bill passed in Arizona to thwart drug-induced abortions has been at least temporarily halted by the Supreme Court. A lower federal court in Florida has blocked a new law (also signed in Georgia) requiring drug testing for food stamp applicants.

Advocates in Texas have banded together to fund travel for those who must now go long distances to find a legal abortion provider. An elite Princeton eating club ousted two officers over emails ridiculing women. The National Football League and some colleges have cracked down on players who engage in domestic violence. The University of Virginia continues its investigation of what has been characterized as a culture of rape on that campus, despite critique of the *Rolling Stone* magazine piece that exposed it.

The military has been shining some light, albeit reluctantly at times, on the alarming rates of sexual assault within its ranks, and the reluctance to report it.

And however saddening, the growing numbers of women who are coming forward to accuse comedian Bill Cosby of drugging and raping, has also increased the focus on the assault of women.

Finally, the Vatican has come out with a report that hails the dedication of American nuns, with no critique, no demands that they back down on social justice issues, no condemnations that a feminist cabal has infested its ranks.

And that's worth a special hallelujah.

In January, I will take up and report on the challenges moving forward.

For now, a little cheerful news seems more fitting.

December 19, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## It's about Violence (and injustice)



As the Unitarian Universalist organization whose mission it is to promote equity for women and girls, we keep a vigilant eye on the many issues impacting what is now commonly called reproductive justice. Conceptualized by a powerful group of women of color in 1994, reproductive justice is defined as the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social and economic well-being of women and girls, based on the full achievement of and protection of women's human rights. As another blogger this past week observed, the slaying of unarmed black men – with no consequence—is a reproductive justice issue, as mothers and would be mothers justifiably fear for the health and safety of their male children. How chilling a prospect.

The Grand Jury decisions in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City exonerating police officers in the shooting deaths of two African American men: one a teenage son of a bereaved mother, the other a husband and father, were horrifying acts of injustice against the women in their lives.

Repeated over and over again, this pattern of unpunished racial violence is as much a concern for the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation as any other work we do.

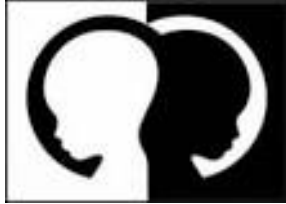
As these events unfolded, and the understandably angry aftermath, the trajectory of sexual violence against women and girls, one out of three over a lifetime, continued: also aided by the systemic protection of their abusers. In our military (with a higher percentage of women of color in the ranks) and on our college campuses, molestation and rape takes place largely unreported. Those women who courageously self-report are more often than not subject to verbal attack, and in the armed forces downgrades in rank.

Recent well-documented (and written) articles in *Rolling Stone Magazine* and the *New York Times* have chronicled the stories of violation and retribution within these institutions. And the parallel extent to which ranks are closed in order to shield reputations and the status quo.

The through line, as is being widely stated, is not that our American system of justice needs to be fixed, rather that it has never existed for so many of us. Whether racism or misogyny, (or homophobia), the blood on the streets of a suburb near Saint Louis or a street corner in Staten Island; the stained sheets on a fraternity house bed in Charlottesville, Virginia and the penetration pain from a molestation on an Air Force base in Kuwait are not new, not rare, and not yet seen as the reprehensible crimes they all are.

December 4, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Another Mother's Son



There is unfortunately always some breaking news to report – or more accurately, old news that is finally getting some print and air time – about sexual violence against women and girls. This week was no exception, from collegiate football players who are apparently being shielded from rape charges in the midst of a winning season; to an esteemed comedian who had been accused for years of drugging and assault; to a gang rape just exposed in a University of Virginia fraternity which has brought to light years of inaction and cover ups of previous known incidents.

The blatant use and misuse of power and privilege to overwhelm, undercut and obliterate the need for legal response and justice.

But for today, rather than point to the commonality, the intersectionality of oppressions, I choose to hold in my heart, to reserve my indignation, and profound discouragement( in light of the decision by a Grand Jury in Missouri to preemptively clear a police officer of any criminal charges in the slaying of an unarmed teenager, yet another young Black male ) for a single form of repression and cruelty.

For today at least I will stay fiercely focused on this act of systemic racism against a mother's son.

November 26, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Great Giving



This week in municipalities and states around the country, in a run up to Thanksgiving and what is arguably the annual season of conspicuous charity, “Give” days are being held. Citizens are urged to contribute financially to local nonprofits and schools, with incentives of matching gifts, Golden Ticket random money prizes, and other incentives, including free metro passes in some areas. In my town, the neighborhood email chat is buzzing with pitches for daycare centers for homeless children and urban wilderness preserves. In Minneapolis, there’s a running tally of the “votes” for Habitat for Humanity, a Twin Cities Dance company, an emergency assistance program – and the

Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

These are heartening efforts to encourage us to open our checkbooks and hearts, re-emphasizing the vast net of non-governmental organizations providing basic and enriching services and contributions to American society. As not for profit executive Wendy Smith observed in her book *Give a Little: How your small donations Can Transform Our World*, dimes (nearly) destroyed polio and five dollars can help beat malaria.

And then there’s great giving.

Such as the \$35 million pledge just announced and reported in the New York Times this morning by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. to allocate money collected in civil forfeiture assets to help other cities and states tackle backlogs in testing rape kits. As I had talked about in a blog earlier this year, at one time NYC had 17,000 untested kits, a grossly unacceptable accumulation of potential evidence in what were admittedly some of that city’s most violent crimes, crimes against women and girls. As a result of outcry and ongoing pressure, this number was sharply reduced, resulting in a number of indictments connected to unsolved cases.

A rape kit is the collection of physical evidence that is gathered when a sexual assault victim is examined, the NY Times reporter explained, including DNA that can be linked back to suspects.

Any of us who have watched the perennially popular network series Law and Order Special Victims Unit are familiar with the centrality of this testing and the frustration when samples are not collected or are stacked on precinct shelves, forgotten. Joining the DA at the press conference heralding this revenue sharing bonanza was SVU star Mariska Hargitay, founder and president of the Joyful Heart Foundation, a rape victim’s advocacy organization that has focused on the issue of unprocessed rape kits for the last several years. This foundation will help distribute the new funds, which come from a several billion dollar settlement with BNP Paribas for violating financial sanctions, part of which went to the district attorney’s office directly and part to the city of New York – among other jurisdictions in the United States.

No money will go outside New York State until it has been determined that there are no untested rape kits within its borders. There will be a survey conducted to determine how many and where other languishing kits there are, estimated to be more than 200,000 at this point. Following this, local

law enforcement agencies will be able to apply for funding to underwrite their testing; processing each kit costs between \$500 to \$1,000.

Great Giving indeed. And not testing an act of great reproductive injustice.

November 13, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## While We are Celebrating



The refusal of the US Supreme Court to hear appeals of favorable lower federal court rulings overturning bans on same sex marriage, opening up legal marriage for gays and lesbians in five more states, is being rightfully celebrated. Change of public opinion and change of legal status have come with great and gratifying speed.

However, while the SCOTUS decision not to hear any cases opposing legalizing these marriages protected and advanced prior actions in a number of states, their choice to stay out of the fray leaves another 20 states without such advancements – at least for now. Following the announcement, attorney generals and governors of some of our most socially conservative states wasted no time announcing they were determined to continue to staunchly defend their constitutional amendments prohibiting same sex union.

There are some seemingly intractable leaders and, more disturbing, intractable regions of this country, where fifty years ago any number of civil rights were still not being granted, that today manifest their mean spiritedness by refusing to recognize and respond to societal transformation. It took bold federal legislation and enlightened court opinions to bend the justice arc then, and it undoubtedly will take an overarching effort now.

Today we applauded the hard won victories in the arena of marriage, while needing to remain vigilant, in fact to deliberately turn our attention toward the continued bludgeoning of the reproductive rights of women in this country – across all 50 states – to make decisions concerning whether or not and when to have children, and to support them in these choices.

While we were applauding the addition of states where people are now free to love and marry whom they wish, a federal court overturned a stay on the Texas law regulating clinics performing abortions to the degree that a large number will now close – unless another appeal is more favorable.

And thanks to reporting by the Feminist Majority, I share three ballot measures that, if successful in November, will be devastating blows to reproductive justice:

If passed by Tennessee voters on November 4, Amendment 1 would allow state politicians to pass laws that ban abortion even in the cases of rape, incest, or to save the health or life of the woman. Politicians could pass state laws that would deny lifesaving [treatments](#) to pregnant women with critical illnesses like cancer, or even ban access to common forms of birth control, like the pill, IUDs, and emergency contraception, that they consider – contrary to respected medical information – to be abortifacients.

[Amendment 1](#) would change the Tennessee state constitution to read: “Nothing in this Constitution secures or protects a right to abortion or requires the funding of an abortion. The people retain the right through their elected state representatives and state senators to enact, amend, or repeal statutes regarding abortion, including, but not limited to, circumstances of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest or when necessary to save the life of the mother.” In effect, if passed, Amendment 1 would

give state politicians the right to make decisions about the health and lives of women, and takes those rights away from women and their doctors.

Tennessee is not the only state with potentially devastating measures on the ballot this fall. [In North Dakota, voters will decide on Measure 1](#), a personhood amendment that would change the state constitution to provide an “inalienable right to life” at “any stage of development.” If passed, Measure 1 would ban all abortions in the state, without exception, and could make illegal many forms of birth control, stem-cell research and [in vitro fertilization](#). Measure 1 also threatens end-of-life care and could interfere with organ donation. And although Colorado voters defeated broad personhood amendments to their state’s constitution in 2008 and 2010, Personhood Colorado has placed Amendment 67 on the ballot this year, which would [amend the state constitution to include “unborn human beings” in the definitions of “person” and “child” in the state criminal code and Wrongful Death Act](#).

We celebrate when any advances are made in the name of social justice. As we must not leave others behind.

October 7, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## Message Toolkit for Bold Reproductive Justice



The gathering a couple of weeks ago in Washington, D.C. of nearly 200 reproductive justice advocates from all over the country under the auspices of the All Above All coalition to restore and sustain abortion coverage for low-income women, was not only high spirited but also grounded in solid messaging.

The role-plays we observed or participated in the day before we descended on Capitol Hill were based on the most recent qualitative and quantitative research. We were briefed, not only on the issue we were there to get some attention for (the last week before a Congressional break for elections), but also immersed in the underlying values that serve as touchstones to remind us why we so persistently support keeping abortion “legal, available, and affordable.”

Values like autonomy: being able to make personal life decisions without interference from politicians, fair treatment; and economic security.

A woman facing these pregnancy decisions should have no interference in her personal decisions; her health and safety need to be a priority; women with fewer resources should not have inferior care or have her options limited due to lack of money.

Many of the mostly younger women who were invited to be part of this lobbying day were connected to student organizations, community health centers, and national family planning and abortion rights organizations. Others formally represented religious groups, or were willing to share their personal convictions. In preparation for our visits, we were also given talking points and message frames for faith-based support for abortion funding.

Interfaith messages like we believe in the inherent worth and equal worth of all people; as such, each person must be treated with respect, regardless of income or insurance. We must not allow our elected officials to single out low income women or others enrolled in public health care programs to limit their access to the full range of reproductive health options and services.

That we believe each person must be able to follow their own beliefs, moral code, and conscience when making life decisions. Current insurance coverage imposes one religious viewpoint on all people, thus infringing upon individual religious liberty.

That a core tenet of most faiths is a commitment to economic and/or social justice. Abortion care restrictions, we were reminded, fly in the face of our commitment to pursue justice. Reducing access to healthcare is an immoral threat to the economic security and well-being of low income families. No matter how much money she has, a woman should be able to access the full range of pregnancy-related care she needs. No one should be forced to choose between her health and her family's financial future.

Inherent worth and dignity, right of conscience, justice – and compassion. Values of our UU faith.

September 30, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The Beat Goes On



UUWF affiliated minister Rev. Marti Keller – third from left – with three of her UU colleagues at the “All Above All” reproductive justice day on Capitol Hill.

They were law students, English students, clinic workers, community organizers, exchanging their piercings and bright colored sneakers for conservative business suits and sensible pumps. Only a few had gray hair, or were alive when the Roe V. Wade came down from the Supreme Court legalizing abortion nationwide – or when only a few years later the Hyde Amendment

eliminated federal Medicaid funding for these procedures.

One hundred seventy women, most of them young (and a few men) had come to Washington, DC last week, in the last few days that Congress was in session prior to the mid-term elections break, under the auspices of a national reproductive justice campaign All Above All. Organizational supporters included the Unitarian Universalist Association (under whose auspices I was invited), Law Students for Reproductive Justice, the Center for Reproductive Rights, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and dozens of other groups.

These delegates were passionate, committed, determined and unafraid to go beyond asking that abortions remain safe and legal. Abortion, they urged, should be covered under insurance plans, private and public, with the goal of ensuring that no matter how much a woman earns, the option of abortion is available. Defunding these procedures should no longer be regarded without question as the permanent law of the land.

Of the gathered activists, some had also gone on a 10,000 mile, 12 city and eight state BraveMobile tour this summer promoting this initiative to restore and sustain abortion coverage for low-income women. Along the way they gathered 40,000 supporters on Facebook, 100,000 on email, and a total of 130,000 signers of a petition to lift coverage bans.

Their goal was and is to gain grassroots support for what is indeed a Be Bold effort to remind Congress and the general public that defunding abortion coverage was not set in stone, but language added annually to the budget act. To point out that nearly one out of seven women of reproductive age are insured through Medicaid, half of them people of color. That restricting Medicaid coverage of abortion forces one in four poor women to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.

Not only does Medicaid currently bar coverage of abortion, other restrictions include the use of government funds to provide coverage for federal employees and military personnel, for federal prison inmates, women in detention centers, military veterans and Native American women.

While there is no legislation drafted to restore this funding, members of Congress and others are being asked to sign a declaration to lift restrictions on abortion coverage, pledging that every woman should have affordable and comprehensive health insurance so she can make personal health decisions based on what is best for her and her family, without political interference.

Bold and Brave advocacy indeed.

*Next Week: New talking points and message frames for reproductive justice.*

September 23, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## By Mail



In a letter to President Obama, the UUWF has joined a broad-based coalition of leading domestic and global organizations spanning women's rights, health, human rights, reproductive justice, young people, the LGBTQ community, faith, and development calling for an end to the incorrect implementation of the Helms Amendment in order to save women's lives and protect their well being.

The Helms Amendment prohibits the use of U.S. foreign assistance funds "to pay for the performance of abortions as a method of family planning." For more than 40 years, the law has been incorrectly implemented as a complete ban on all abortion-related services. The letter urges swift action to allow support for abortion care for women who have been raped, who are victims of incest, or who face a life-endangering pregnancy in countries where those services are legally available.

And then there's the large matter of places where surgical abortions are not permitted, or virtually unavailable.

A recent cover of the New York Times Sunday magazine was a photo of white mailer with a New Delhi postmark with the stark words: Abortion by Mail. The inside story by Emily Bazelon described the reality of post-clinic abortions, pregnancy termination achieved not by a medical procedure but by the use of the drugs including mifepristone (used to be called RU-486) and misoprostol. These pills are given to women in the first trimester to induce a miscarriage.

Reproductive justice activists like Rebecca Gomperts, whose [Women on the Web](#) offers "telemedicine support" services for women around the world without legal, practical and/or financial access to surgical abortion, began their work internationally. They have targeted the almost 40 percent of the world's population living in countries where this abortion method is either banned or severely restricted, as the Times article pointed out. In places like much of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Persian Gulf, a pharmaceutical abortion, while longer in duration and often painful, can be the only safe alternative. Especially when women have access to them through the mail and with the availability of a help desk.

Most of the thousands of emails that have come to *Women on the Web* have come from outside the United States. Forty to 60 a month now are from women in this country, double the number from two years ago. Gomperts' group will not serve these women, believing that there are resources here to fight the onerous laws making it hard for doctors to dispense these medications and difficult for rural women and other women who live far distances from these physicians to have a medical abortion. Efforts to set up means of telemedicine consultation with supervising medical staff have proved safe and practical. They are also being shut down.

Legal abortion is not available abortion. Whether in India or Mississippi or Texas, barriers of geography and cost can render women unable to follow through on their reproductive decisions.

That's where reproductive justice comes in.

September 9, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The New Suffragettes



A quaint term, for sure, Suffragettes, used to describe women seeking the right to vote for females, especially British women who mounted militant protests in the United Kingdom in the early 20th century.

That old-fashioned word somehow came up for me this past week as we remembered the anniversary of the ratification of the 19th constitutional amendment granting the right to vote to American women in 1920. A victory that was long in coming and not without marginalizing many African Americans.

We are reminded by suffrage historians that the right to vote movement in this country began with strong African American women like Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Sojourner Truth. However, by 1890, when two rival organizations, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association, merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the issue of race emerged and divided the movement.

For NAWSA, excluding black women was being seen as a winning tactic and the group concentrated on gaining the vote only for white women. Instead of being viewed as powerful allies, Colored Women's Clubs in the North were seen as liabilities, that gaining suffrage for African Americans would accord them more power, something that Southern whites – male and female – often saw as a threat.

One tactic of the white-focused NAWSA movement was to put forth the idea of the “educated suffragist,” with the notion that being educated was a de facto pre-requisite for being allowed the right to vote. The hope was that since access to quality and higher education was more difficult for African American women in some situations not of their own making, this would lead to their exclusion from the ranks of voters should an amendment ever pass.

Once women's right to vote was passed and ratified, African American women found themselves at the receiving end of many disenfranchisement methods, were are reminded: long waiting times, head taxes, and preposterous new tests.

This dismaying history – and at the same time the determination of African American women (and men) to gain and exercise their franchises – certainly has resonated in recent days as the town of Ferguson, Missouri mourned the shooting death of one of its own, 18 year old Michael Brown. The nation has watched the outrage and the calls for action that have followed. Including pleas, as one reporter noted, to change protest chants into humane legislation and just law. Beginning with showing up at the voting booth.

“Let your voices be heard( by voting) and let everyone know that we have had enough of all this,” said Eric Davis, Michael Brown's cousin.

Last April only 6 percent of eligible black voters in Ferguson went to the polls for a primary. One of the town's residents, Shirley Scale, admitted that she had moved from another town and had not registered to vote. She said she was ashamed.

Overall, only 12 percent of all the voters in the town had shown up for that election, a pattern that has been repeated all over the country, in non-Presidential contests especially.

As women, our legal ability to vote was secured 84 years ago this month, with many obstacles along the way for sisters of color to actually enter those polling booths and cast those ballots. We need to call ourselves into a New Suffrage movement in the upcoming weeks before November to register and get out our votes. In Michael's name and the in the name of all those other young people whose deaths we grieve.

August 28, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## [FixHobbyLobby](#)



This past week has been heart-wrenching for those of us seeking dignity, justice and equity for all people. The African American men, women and children in Ferguson, Missouri, have been subject to and have borne painful witness that we are far from living in a post-racial society. Across the country and the world, the social media postings have multiplied each day with expressions of sorrow and righteous anger for the senseless killing of another mother's son.

We Unitarian Universalist women care about and worry about and respond faithfully to violations of the human spirit and human rights. So we can feel pulled in so many directions on a daily basis as cyberspace communications provide more and more ways to find out what's happening on an almost momentary basis.

While racism rages in a suburb in the Mid-West, those of us who monitor and seek reproductive justice must find ways to continue to put focus on righting this wrong as well.

Today (August 20) faith organizations and voices supporting individual religious liberty will be taking to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels to continue to call attention to the urgent need to restore women and workers' reproductive freedoms in the wake of the recent Supreme Court's outrageous and harmful Hobby Lobby ruling. Specifically, we will be urging Congress to pass the Protect Women's Health from Corporate Interference Act, otherwise known as Not My Boss' Business Act, as a first step in undoing the damage created when a 5-4 majority of our highest court ruled that privately held companies had standing as a "person"—whose owners' beliefs about contraception trumps those of the women working for them.

This proposed legislation would provide a way for this medical service to be paid for in cases where an employer refuses to provide this coverage under the national Affordable Care Act. It is a start toward reversal of the damage that will be caused by this dangerous decision.

Starting at 2 p.m. today, we are asking UUWF members, other UU women and our male allies to post messages of support for this bill using the shared hashtag, #FixHobbyLobby.

Here is a sample tweet you can use at the start of the Tweet Storm or throughout the day: It's time to #FixHobbyLobby. Congress should pass the Not My Boss' Business Act as 1st step to safeguard health & religious liberty for all.

August 20, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## Time to Talk



We Unitarian Universalists are often encouraged to come up with and get comfortable delivering so-called elevator speeches. Those pithy, direct, persuasive sentences that summarize just exactly what our faith tradition is (rather than what it is not).

Or slap on bumper strips, of which we have had many over recent years. My car is papered over with different versions, including my personal favorites: *Affirming the Worth and Dignity of All People* and *Deeds Because Actions Speak Louder than Words*.

Speeches and stickers that might at least buy us some respect in the religious marketplace, let alone a few visitors, even members.

In the years I worked as a spokesperson – and trainer of spokespeople – for Planned Parenthood, we also created and refined and then re-created our elevator speeches, our bumper stickers for similar reasons: to give some heft to our stands, to gain sympathy, even active support. Perhaps the most familiar would be *Keep Abortion Safe and Legal*. Not far behind might be *Pro-Child, Pro-Choice: Every Child a Wanted Child*; or *My Body, My Choice*. A more recent one is *I Stand With Texas Women*, much less obvious, referring to the battle there over a bill which was initially filibustered away but ultimately decisively passed by the state legislature. This new law, scheduled to go into effect September 1., requires doctors performing abortions in clinics to have privileges at nearby hospitals, and the clinics to have operating rooms and other hospital-style standards.

On the surface this can sound benign, even desirable. That is until the outcome is described: unnecessary upgrades for a procedure that has been proven safe and rarely complicated, unaffordable for the providers, forcing closures. Doctors warn that being granted affiliation with hospitals in conservative and often hostile environments for abortion is hard to come by.

Projections are that 18 clinics will close as a result of this legislation, leaving only seven abortion facilities in the state, all of them in major cities and none in the Western half of the nation's second largest state. More than 2,000 abortions per year have been performed in El Paso, with the real probability that the only clinic remaining open in September will be a referring clinic – letting women know their options in other parts of Texas and even other states but unable to perform them on site.

The statistics are flying from both sides and arguments mounting as an appeal to the law has been heard and is now in the hands of a US. District court judge. While opponents of the law point out the hardship to women in terms of unthinkable long drives – hundreds of miles – to have an abortion within state lines, state attorneys counter that they will have an option to cross over into New Mexico, where these same so-called health and safety requirements do not exist.

Last month another federal judge in Mississippi, faced with a law that would shut down all the remaining abortion clinics there, ruled that a state can't shift obligations on constitutional rights – in this case the abortion access – to other parts of the country. *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion

nationwide in the same way voting rights and school integration are the law nationwide, with the expectation that there is parity from state to state.

What does it actually mean to have access to the polls, to schools, and to reproductive choices? In each of these arenas, what is the human face of the barriers and outright denials?

As opponents of these basic human rights find more and more flagrantly cynical ( and strategically clever) ways to chip away at and de facto wipe out access to these mandates, elevator speeches and bumper stickers are less and less effective in making our case that on the ground we are losing so much ground so fast.

UUWF belongs to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice which, while remaining steadfastly pro-choice on the issue of legal abortion, is looking at how we might be more nuanced and more persuasive in our conversations – beyond bumper stickers and one liners. The coalition has introduced a 'Time to Talk, “a call to action that we must have authentic conversations that are based on our lived experiences” across a wide variety of faith traditions.

The UU pulpit is once place where more of this might and should happen, and not just during the anniversary week of Roe V, Wade. We preachers need to find a way to balance the trend toward fixed themes and long scheduled sermon titles to respond more flexibly and forcefully to what is happening in El Paso, Tupelo, Montgomery, and other towns and states across our land.

For more information and to order the new RCRC sermon guide go to <https://rcrc.wufoo.com/forms/its-time-to-talk-resource-request/>

August 14, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## (Some) Good News for Summer



Whether it is news around gun violence or violence in the Middle East it is entirely possible to feel that nothing ever changes, that no progress is ever made.

In the arena of justice and equity for women and girls this can be equally true, with a recent Facebook posting by a male UU ministerial colleague mine this past week bleakly reminding all of his “friends” on social media that in 2013 alone there were 624 bills introduced in states and on the federal level intended to regulate women’s bodies — vs. none in the entire history of men. As a former journalist, I would have liked to have fact checked this statement, but intuitively I believe this is in the ballpark of accuracy. Which can make the dog days of August even more disconsolate for me than ever, with gratitude only that our elected bodies are mostly on summer break, with at least a respite from further inroads into our human dignity — privacy and sovereignty over our own lives. But then there are some good pieces of news, that I clip and save in a folder called just that good news for females — some of which I want to share because we need some sense of hopefulness as we gear up for yet another year of attacks and challenges:

- A bipartisan group of US Senators has introduced legislation aimed at curbing the number of sexual assaults on college campuses, requiring these schools to make public (publish online) the results of anonymous surveys documenting these occurrences and imposing hefty fines for violations of this requirement for all colleges and universities receiving federal financial aid. The proposed bill, the Clery Act, would also require these schools to provide confidential advisors to help victims report their crimes and receive follow up services. There is also a prohibition for punishing students for surrounding behaviors—like underage drinking—if they are reporting a sexual violence incident.
- Last week a federal appellate court ruled that Mississippi’s 2012 law requiring doctors performing abortions to obtain admitting privileges at local hospitals, creating such a chilling effect and barrier — as many hospital reject or ignore these applications and will not grant privileges to out of state doctors — that the initial implementation of the law nearly forced the closure of the state’s last abortion clinic. The ruling was 2-1 with the majority judges holding that every state must guarantee constitutional rights, including the right to end a pregnancy through abortion, as determined through the US Supreme Court decision in 1973. The doctor’s privileges law that had been signed by Gov. Phil Bryant had, in their view, “effectively extinguished that right within Mississippi’s borders.”
- An interview in last Sunday’s NY Times book review section with popular novelist Amy Bloom gave a boost to the notion that there needs to be more and more compelling writing about why women’s reproductive rights are so important to this country, as she told her interviewer when asked to say what one book she wished someone else should write. She would hope that such a book, “clearly and persuasively articulated,” would make all opposition to reproductive rights “vanish like morning mist.”

Next week: A look at the new sermon resource from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, of which the UUWF is a founding member and I am your representative to the Coalition Council.

August 5, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Dark Monday with Darker Days Ahead



Clergy handing out condoms at a Hobby Lobby store in Illinois.

On a very recent dark Monday in June, by a narrow majority (5-4), five male Supreme Court justices ruled in favor of the national crafting store Hobby Lobby and a small furniture making business that sued the federal government for the right to opt out of the no-cost contraception coverage provision of the Affordable Healthcare Act (AHA). They had specifically objected to four kinds of birth control they regard as inducing an abortion. What they got was at first touted by

those signing the ruling as a narrowly crafted exemption, with even a suggestion to the administration that it figure out a way to pay for this preventive healthcare so as not to deny coverage completely for those females working for companies with faith-based objections. It was not long after the decision was issued, a day or so at most, before what might have seemed a most calculating slender decision — around a few methods of preventing unintended pregnancies and only for “closely held” corporations — was clearly much broader and even more odious. 14 other businesses were already poised to sue for the same religious exemption for a blanket variety of contraceptives. The definition of closely held corporation — a private company owned by five or fewer persons — was found to apply to more than 90 percent of all businesses. And the possibility of figuring a way for impacted women employees to still get free coverage dimmed by the hour as conservative religious organizations began arguing against any way to transfer the cost to another payee.

Besides the imagined ever expanding possible application of this ruling to other kinds of health care coverage frowned on by one faith group or another, it took almost no time at all before there was the hint, and more than a hint, that the religious liberty exemption argument might well be issued to discriminate against populations other than reproductive age women and for other than medical procedures.

As one of my ministerial colleagues posted on Facebook:

*“It begins! Now a request for religious exemptions for hiring practices for LGBT folks from some well- established “Christian” institutions.”*

The alarm had gone off concerning the potential for reversing some of the gains for our siblings in that movement: the ban on discrimination in providing goods and services in Arizona for one, if it could be proven that this was being done based on the religious beliefs of the business owners.

I posted a comment on his FB page saying that “IT” had begun that Monday mid-morning when the Hobby Lobby ruling had come down so decisively and contemptuously on the side of corporations (and in truth, the owners whose individual ideologies lead them to deny this basic preventive healthcare service to the women who work for them).

The misogyny. The physical and emotional damages.

We need to find ways to talk about the ripples of oppression and harm that may inevitably stem from this ill-considered verdict while not losing focus on the women in this country who were originally targeted.

July 10, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Crashing Waves



A week ago, feminist activist and civil rights lawyer Karen DeCrow, who led the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the 1970s, died. She was 76 years old.

A longtime friend described her as the “perfect model for the women’s movement.” In addition to her unflagging advocacy work, DeCrow had been a journalist and prolific writer. While a law student at Syracuse University she ran for mayor of the town, a first in the state of New York.

DeCrow campaigned for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, passed by Congress in 1972, but eventually falling short of the necessary legislative approval at the state level. There were crushing disappointments which she saw as backward turning losses.

Her obituary detailed the work she did as NOW president, an organization she joined after experiencing pay inequality in her own workplace: pressuring government agencies and big corporations to hire more women and calling for federal investigations of gender. She lobbied Ivy League schools to enroll more female students, urged social groups to open their male-dominated membership rolls and NASA to recruit more female astronauts.

DeCrow was a full decade older than me at the time of her still untimely death, a member of that generation of women who carried the heaviest load of the work in support of the right to reproductive choices and constitutional parity when I was in my 20’s. Instead of women’s rights, my witness was focused on (or was distracted by) opposing the draft for the Vietnam War; protesting the presence of military ROTC on my campus; alliances around the Black and Latino power movements; and a bit later on juggling the challenges of being a very young wife and mother struggling to stay on some sort of vocational track and having my personal voice heard. I benefited, as did so many of us, from the dedication of the preceding cohort of women to causes we were not yet tuned into, or ready to take on.

Her not-to-be-silenced generation Second Wave feminists orchestrated so many of the victories and suffered the defeats of those years, just as perhaps my wave (Second Plus) did the same for the Generation X women. They were coming into young adulthood, when we Boomers worked to stem the assault on the legal integrity of the Supreme Court decision around legal abortion and access to contraception, that so quickly followed what we thought was the end of that particular battle.

Wave upon wave of women who have benefited from the time and energies and talents of those who went before them, is the story of the slow, and often frustrating progress of justice and equity for successive generations of women and girls.

This narrative, and the stories that make it up will be the subject of what promises to be an engaging and inspiring program at the upcoming UU General Assembly in Providence, RI.

“Crashing Waves: Multi-Generational Feminisms” will feature women from several generations in a conversation about what our experiences have been, and ways in which our passions and our

challenges resonate and differ. I will be a panelist, as will Kathy Calhoun, the Vice President for Leadership Development for the UUWF. The women's auxiliary group in Kathy's Dallas UU congregation played a pivotal role in the Roe v Wade court decision.

It promises to be a rich and instructive session. I will post about it following the end of the General Assembly, and about our own UUWF program about forming effective feminist's relationships/collaborations to work successfully on behalf of women's issues.

June 13, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## UUWF: Biting Back



I spent just as much if not more time in the newsroom of the campus newspaper as I did attending classes at the University of California in Berkeley. Having discovered it in the first few weeks of my freshman year: an activity, a purpose, a refuge, a community, a training ground for a vocation I have never really given up. The clunky typewriters (yes that ages me), the scarred oak desks, the stacks of cheap brown half sheets we were expected to compose our stories on: stories of Black Power protests, ROTC

protests, anti-war protests, People's Park protests — a lot of unrest — and also the rich cultural offerings of that day, "The Day."

In the midst of all the tumult and the tear gas volleys, I got to see and write about Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, Crosby, Stills and Nash, French noir films, Ingrid Bergman movie festivals, the early third wave women poets.

I never rose above the modest but satisfying rank of arts editor, summer editor, weekly magazine editor, but I saw other women do so, women who were placed on the senior editorial board as city, managing, and even senior editors. Women who went on, very quickly, to admirable, career-building positions at the Washington Post and other major publications, but who never quite made it to the top before the print marketplace began to spiral down and Golden Handshakes became common.

The women who went on, the women who in many ways "made it," had been tough, demanding, intimidating. They held their own on the third floor of Eshelman Hall, going toe to toe with the young men who they dared disagree with, whether beginning reporters or fellow editors.

So it was with great interest and high suspicion that I read about the firing of Jill Abramson as executive editor of The New York Times, being called by some Abramson-gate.

As Jane Eisner, executive editor of The Forward, a superb and venerable newspaper chronicling the Jewish world here and abroad, has said, Abramson's dismissal and its fall-out is inalterably sad. Sad for me as I read the complaints about her high handed and aggressive style (according to some of her staff). Her sacking came at the same time as that of an editor for Paris Match and seven years after that of Amanda Bennett, the first woman editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer, who has commented that the difference between the public reaction to her departure and now is "terrible and wonderful." "Terrible," she says, "because whatever the facts of Abramson's departure it exposed in a raw way the reservoirs of resentment, hurt and distrust that women feel at work." And wonderful because something fundamental has changed.

Something fundamental like Abramson refusing to resign and revealing her displeasure from the outset that she had earned a lower salary than her male predecessors. Her sharing of this has led to the sharing of disparities in the ranks of other professions — that "20 percent female tax" as Jane Eisner puts it, levied on women just because we are women.

Women as witchy harridans. Females as discount employees.

As Eisner asserts, a lesson that has come out of this unfortunate and discouraging corporate controversy is this: Don't treat women leaders unfairly. They will bite back.

June 6, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## A week in the life of women



### **#yesallwomen**

This past week, a disturbed young man in California stabbed and shot both women and men — killing six, wounding 13 — and then committed suicide. Left behind in social media were his plans, especially a YouTube posting documenting his intentions to murder three people in his apartment building and then attack a sorority house in Isla Vista near UC Santa Barbara. It is the same college community where my own daughter lived during the time she

attended nearby Santa Barbara City College. Once his rampage began, he settled on attacking passersby, including two female students.

In his video and an online manifesto he published just before what one journalist has called his “spasm of violence,” the killer talked about his War on Women. “I will punish all females for the crime of depriving me of sex,” he announced. While he could not “kill every single female on earth,” he said, he could “deliver a devastating blow that will shake all of them to the core of their wicked hearts.”

His writings — his rantings — also declared that women are like a plague, needing to be contained in concentration camps, starved to death.

This act — and the premeditated rationale behind it — has resulted in a flurry of rage and fear, including a hashtag [#YESALLWomen](#) that has gone viral. It is an effort to keep attention on the underlying (if extreme) misogyny, the hatred against females, that fueled the attacks. And personalize it by the sharing of other stories: the threats; the date rapes; the beatings, stabbings, shootings. Large and small, the indignities, the terrors and horrors were and are being named.

As the LA Times reported, statistically speaking such rampages are rare, but man-on-woman violence is not. Most recent data indicates that in this country, an average of seven women are slain each day, most of them knowing their attacker — who is usually male.

Also this week, in our local daily I read a reprinted Associated Press story about a pregnant woman in Pakistan who had been stoned to death by her own family outside a courthouse for marrying the man she loved. She had refused an arranged marriage, and her father had filed a kidnapping charge against her husband before resorting to this so called honor killing, one of an estimated 5,000 that still take place every year, most of them in Muslim countries or communities.

Misogyny in action, here and around the world.

I checked in with the Unitarian Universalist Association justice staff a few days ago — following these two horrific events — inquiring whether our liberal religious movement has ever taken a formal position in the form of a statement of conscience or other vehicles against women-hating,

just as we have against racism — personal and institutional, and homophobia. It may be that our current study action initiative focusing on [reproductive justice](#) may circle the underlying issue (or an underlying issue), but will it get us where we need to be in terms of recognizing and naming hatred and hate crimes for what they are?

Yes, this Elliot Rodger was a person with a long history of mental unbalance, just as many of the racists, homophobes and anti-Semites have been. But his mindset and his acts also arose out of a deep and longstanding culture of permission around cruelty towards women and girls.

May the twitter feeds and more important frank and urgent conversations continue within UU.

It is past time.

May 29, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Emily's Genius



From the daguerreotype taken at Mount Holyoke, December 1846 or early 1847. The only authenticated portrait of Emily Dickinson later than childhood, the original is held by the Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College.[\[1\]](#) – Wikipedia

Last Saturday, I checked off an experience on my ever-changing bucket list: attending a One Day University. This “extraordinary day of learning” which I had long read about in full page ads in the New York Times features popular college and university professors: shrinking a semester’s worth of lecturing into 75 minute sessions. It had finally come to my neck of the woods. I didn’t have to spring for an airline ticket and hotel room to register for and enjoy the four presentations I selected. And as the introduction to the program reminded me — there was no

homework, no exams, and “best of all, no stress.”

Well not exactly. I had ended up picking classes taught by male professors (there were a couple led by women, with topics not as compelling to me). And as engaging and personable as they all were, they couldn’t seem to come up with examples of women as objects (the biology and psychology of resilience) or women as subjects (Geniuses). The latter session was led by Craig Wright, a professor of music at Yale University, where he teaches a course on The Nature of Genius: scanning Western History for figures like Mozart, Leonardo da Vinci and Einstein.

The definition of Genius:

- Extraordinary intellectual and creative power.
- A person of extraordinary intellect and talent.
- A person who has an exceptionally high intelligence quotient, typically above 140 (not necessarily so as we recognize multiple intelligences).

Men — and all the exemplars were men — who not only were smart, exceptionally smart, but whose work made a difference in our history, cultural, intellectual, literary, scientific, etc.

Professor Wright acknowledged early on that he had not listed any women, and in response to a question I asked about whether or not this was due to bias or disadvantage, he cited Virginia Woolf’s landmark essay on the barriers to women in academia and other fields: exclusion from institutions of influence; lack of money, poorer food and lodging; lack of places to concentrate on work or places to publish, teach, display their art.

All of this was true when Shakespeare’s fictional (or perhaps real) sister set off to London to make her way as a playwright and poet, ending up in ruin. It was still true when Woolf described the status of women in 20th century England, in many ways true today.

Yet there have been notable women, genius women who have deserved to be in the pantheon of the luminaries, as he describes them.

May 15 is the anniversary of the death of **Emily Dickinson**, poet extraordinaire, who grew up in a Unitarian home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Whether it was social phobia or epilepsy, or the protection of her writing gifts that kept her housebound for most of her life is not known for sure. But the 1800 poems she wrote, few of them published while she was alive, changed the face of American Poetry in form and content. The significance of her choice of topics: love, family, death and nature: personal and honest, cannot be underestimated, nor the popularization of her poetry and poetry in general after her death.

I am about to embark on a contemporary poetry project involving 52 verses scribbled on discarded envelopes (just as Emily did) as a continuation, hopefully of poetic innovation.

Our Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation Margaret Fuller Awards for creative, academic, scholarly, and prophetic work by today's women was launched to encourage our female geniuses to seek and achieve innovation and standing.

In Emily's honor and memory may we be encouraged to do so.

May 15, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Mamas and Diapers



It looked like a pantry. It was the size of a double closet, with lots of shelves, kept locked day and night. The key to it was held by the director of this emergency shelter for women and their children, a very temporary home for families who had been referred to us by the umbrella task force on homelessness, or through local churches or social workers. It was not a domestic violence safe space: nonetheless the former youth hostel had no identifying signage, nothing to indicate who was living there, or indeed if anyone was living there at all on a street with a number of law offices and other businesses.

The residents arrived often with only what they could fit in large plastic garbage bags, or loose, crammed in the trunks of their aging cars. They came to us with children of all ages; in fact we were the only shelter in the entire metro area that allowed more than four minors in a family unit and older boys. We provided them with the basics: a cold breakfast, a volunteer provided dinner; bedding, towels, toiletries.

Inside the closet that was not a pantry were other essentials: fever and pain reduction over the counter pills, cough syrup, bandages, and most precious—sanitary supplies and a small inventory of diapers. The day shelters and specialized child care center for homeless infants and small children where our homeless clients spent part of the time provided diapers on site, but not for the many hours the children were offsite: not at night or early in the morning, or on the weekends.

We did what we could for our guests while they were enrolled in our program. As they transitioned out, often gradually, from group shelter to freestanding subsidized (in fact essentially free rent) apartments and houses and then independence, it became more and more their responsibility to resume providing for their children, including diapers.

While the area pantries, including one we operated, could help with canned and other nonperishable foodstuffs, it was hit and miss if a family asked for nonfood items. Food drives rarely include a call for paper goods or packages of diapers, absolute necessities for an extended period for many of our mothers (and other caregivers). The cost of providing disposable diapers for a newborn (most parents in these situations do not have access to washers and dryers on a daily basis—in fact coin laundries often ban them for health reasons, as do childcare centers) is estimated at up to \$100 a month for one baby, or eight to ten a day.

Emergency pantries that do have a limited supply of diapers find themselves able only to give a mother in need four to six diapers at a time.

For financially strapped parents, this expense can take up a large chunk of the monthly fixed income they receive, either in low wages or from the small cash grants awarded them through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) safety net program. And while formula purchases can be paid for with food stamps or WIC, diapers and other essential nonfood products cannot.



The risks to babies, toddlers and their Mamas (or other caregivers) are great. Researchers have found that in addition to causing infection and disease, the lack of an adequate supply of diapers can lead to maternal depression and violence: shame, frustration, a pressure to rush toilet training.

While glossy Mother's Day ads urge us to honor and reward Mamas with flowers, candy and bracelet charms, for many mothers a reliable supply of diapers would have a lasting impact on their self-worth and dignity and the care of their babies.

In the short run, there is a movement to establish diaper banks. In the longer run, hopefully not too much longer, more realistic cash assistance to low income families is in order, allowing them to cover not just food basics but other basics as well.

And then there is the matter of fair wages.

May 7, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## War on Poor: War on Women



Last week the focus was on a new law in Tennessee calling for felony penalties against pregnant women who test positive for illegal narcotics. Just this week, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal signed a bill requiring drug testing — at their own expense — of some applicants for food stamps and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). An applicant would be forced to be tested on the basis of either missed appointments or her “demeanor” as determined by a state worker, a vague and dangerous version of profiling.

Georgia would be the first state to require this of food stamp (SNAP) seekers, something currently not permitted under federal law. While the Georgia law can’t go into effect until a change in federal law, the House has already passed a measure to lift the ban on states adding their own conditions to food stamp eligibility. If the Senate passes its own version, then it opens the door more quickly for states to jump on board.

This seems consistent with what opponents have called a mean-spirited and politically motivated war on the poor — overwhelmingly a war on women and in many if not most cases their minor children. Federal welfare funds go to single women and children. Over half of all food stamp benefits go to women, nearly half to children.

This new Georgia law is being described as the most aggressive of a raft of laws that have been either proposed or passed in recent years. A dozen states have laws now requiring screening for possible drug testing as a condition of receiving poverty aid. Only Georgia so far now extends this to food stamp recipients and shifts the cost of drug testing to the individual applicant.

States with mandatory drug testing attached to these safety net programs have rooted out a few applicants who have failed the drug test — out of the 1,588 people singled out for drug testing in Utah and the 762 who ended up taking one last year, there were only five confirmed failed tests.

Check out whether your state is among those with these laws already on the books and let your legislators and Governor that this is nothing less than an effort to bash the poor and poor women with children at that. If your state does not yet have a law like these, stay vigilant.

Copycat laws have a way of cropping up quickly and passed with little chance to speak out on the side of compassion.

April 30, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Assault



The passage of the study action initiative on reproductive justice a couple of years back by the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) — of which we are an associate organization — challenged us to look at issues of human sexuality, pregnancy, and gender identity in different ways than our prior focus on legal rights and access to care. The four-year period dedicated to education and discernment allows us to ponder and respond to questions such as:

- How do power structures limit individuals' access to reproductive justice?
- How do sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse contribute to unintended pregnancies later in life?
- How can eliminating racism, classism and sexism reduce the need for abortion and enable families to care for the children they do have?
- How are pregnant women who use drugs stigmatized, and what are the real dangers and solutions?

The latter question is one that might especially challenge those of us who have accepted as indisputably true that the use of illegal drugs by pregnant women is something that should be condemned in the harshest terms. We hold in our minds and hearts images of crack babies, narcotics withdrawal, and permanent damage.

This past week, Tennessee became the first state specifically allowing the filing of assault charges with a penalty of up to 15 years when a fetus or newborn is judged to be harmed by illegal narcotics. It is now on Governor Bill Hassam's desk to veto or sign.

The New York Times in an editorial declared that “even by the standards of the growing... assault on lives and rights of women” this one is especially “mean-spirited and counterproductive.” They call on the governor to heed the pleas of medical specialists in obstetrics and drug addictions, as well as women's rights groups, to stop this bill.

A recent news story in the same paper had reported that risks to newborns have been exaggerated and that withdrawal symptoms can now be treated without long-term impact on the mental and physical health on these children. Instead of acting in the best interest of the child, the measure's main impact will more likely be frightening drug-using pregnant women away from seeking necessary prenatal care or to have abortions in order to avoid being jailed.

This is not the first time in recent years that Tennessee has passed this type of measure. Previous measures have been modified or abandoned.

Instead of continuing to punish and bully pregnant women whose choices have been unwise, the Times urges policy makers to turn their attention to funding efforts to address and alleviate well documented pregnancy risks: poverty, cigarettes, alcohol, and prescribed drugs—the biggest threats today.

This law and others that will inevitably follow it give us the opportunity to have serious and perhaps highly challenging conversations within our own UU communities. And call for the deepest compassion and commitment to true justice.

April 24, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Equal Pay at the Altar? (and the war of statistics)

*(thanks to NOWNYC.org)*

My thoughtful feminist husband first told me about it: the latest salvo in the defensive battle being waged against equal pay for equal work by women. It was the grenade tossed by Phyllis Schlafly, founder of the so-called “pro family” organization Eagle Forum. As she wrote in a *Christian Post* op-ed published earlier this week and reported on ironically in *Huff Post*, it is her opinion that “providing women with equal pay for equal work would deter their chances for finding a suitable mate.”

Schlafly argued that since women prefer to marry men who make more money than they do, decreasing the gender gap would leave a woman tragically unable to snag a husband. She names this “fact” hypergamy, which she says means that not only do women instinctively prefer higher paying mates but that men also generally prefer being the higher earner in a relationship.

So if somehow the pay gap between men and women ever is eliminated, she reasons, using what she admits is simple arithmetic, half of all women would be unable to find a husband. Which is a very bad thing, worse than being poorer and less valued.

This longtime opponent to the equal rights amendment went on to add that besides the need to protect women from a marriage-less existence, equality of pay is undeserved by women because “they work fewer hours per day, per week, per year” and prefer a pleasant working environment and conditions over an evened out paycheck.

In other words, this aspect of what is sometimes coined the war on women (on both sides of the spectrum), the commonly accepted statistic that women earn only 77 percent of what men earn is either a very good thing — or a status women bring on themselves. Or is an essential part of their nature, the inherent difference between women and men.

Fellow conservative columnist Thomas Sowell also took on equal pay for equal work this week, alleging that the reason this statistic is what it is—which he doubts is accurate at all on the face of it — is due to the whole range of what he sees as reasonable and inevitable difference between women’s patterns and men’s patterns in the labor market. It’s just who they are.

For example, he points out, some women are mothers and others are fathers. He admits that the biggest disparities in incomes are between fathers and mothers. The reason: “if you don’t think children take up a mother’s time, you just haven’t raised any children,” he says.

How surprising is it, he postulates, that men with children earn not only more than women with children but men without children (just the opposite of the gap between women with no children and mothers) earn more than men without children because “a man who has more mouths to feed is more likely to work longer hours and take on harder and more dangerous jobs to earn more money.”

He disputes any allegation that men are offered and paid more than women every time they hire a man to do a job that a woman could do just as well. They would be fools, he declared.

Foolish indeed.

In a new book *What Works for Women at Work*, co-authored by Joan C. Williams, founding director of the Center for Worklife Law at the University of California's Hastings law school, and her daughter Rachel Dempsey, they lay out the actual statistics. Women with children indeed not only make less money in the workforce, they are 79 percent less likely to be hired at all than are similarly qualified women without children. Men with children, on the other hand, are more likely to be given a promotion or pay increase.

Statistics can be dry and impenetrable. We often prefer narratives, the stories behind them, as we work for change. But in the wrong hands, data can be used in manipulative and insidious ways.

Women: arm yourselves.

April 17, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Dallas Women's Alliance Still in the Thick of Reproductive Justice Movement



Texas Freedom Network – Lifting Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice

As the UU Women's Federation representative to the national Religious Council on Reproductive Choice (RCRC), I recently had the experience of joining other faith leaders in Washington DC for the council meeting and to stand with them on the steps of the US Supreme Court to protest the Hobby Lobby case asking for a corporate religious exemption from covering birth control under the Affordable Care Act(ACA).

This morning I rejoined this group by conference call to hear breaking news about an RCRC event in Dallas Texas last night (Monday April 7) held at the First Dallas UU Church with a goal of rebooting choice activities in that much beleaguered state. Especially on the heels of the recent passage of a law calling for new requirements of practitioners which effectively has shut down multiple abortion providing clinics.





Sarah Weddington

Working with the Texas Freedom Network, Catholics for Choice, and other local organizations, Rev. Rob Keithan, a UU and policy director for RCRC, helped pull together an evening honoring Sarah Weddington, who at age 26 was recruited by the UUWF alliance women in that congregation to argue the Roe v. Wade case. This had followed an extensive effort to research the need for safe and legal abortion by this courageous and groundbreaking group of women.

Several of the alliance women were present to be honored and to honor Ms. Weddington.

Around 200 people attended, as Rob noted, on the evening of a college basketball final game nearby.

The hope going forward is this tribute evening is the formation of a Voices for Reproductive Justices network in this state, building on the efforts of UU women more than 40 years ago.

April 8, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Minimum Wage Is a Women's Issue

I was a recent graduate in journalism from a prestigious state university, having been living temporarily in my teenage bedroom in my mother's house with my then husband, a college drop-out at a time when the expectation and assumption was that if we were over 18, we were no longer literally part of our parents' households. We moved into a modest apartment with thin walls, erratic heat, and monthly rent and utility bills.

He was working low wage swing shift in the credit department of a major furniture dealer 30 miles away, after having done some time at an even lower paying job in a canned food warehouse. I had given up looking for a position even vaguely related to my major and the field I had been trained for, landing a very part-time job as a counter girl (and girl it was) in an ice cream store, handing out samples of apple strudel and rocky road (chocolate and walnuts) ice cream and scooping cones from the bottom of cardboard containers. After only a few days, my hands and arms were cramped and sore and my fingers burned from spending so much time in frost and ice. To this day I cannot imagine tasting, let alone relishing any of the dozens of rotating flavors.

I was paid \$1.60 an hour, minimum wage, with of course no benefits at all.

Fortunately, it was not too long before a student loan for graduate school kicked in. But long enough for us to experience extreme paycheck anxiety, worries about securing enough good food to support my first pregnancy, and gratitude for the possibility of bridge loans and gifts from parents who did not in general believe it was their responsibility to provide for us. Who nonetheless would not let us be homeless or completely without means, unlike so many others in our situation as struggling young adults.

We were, I was even then not the assumed typical minimum wage worker: a teenager working part-time after school, living with two fully employed parents, earning extra spending money, staying out of trouble. Then, as now, 88 percent of minimum wage workers were over 20 (the average 35 years old), two thirds of them women.



Kara Smith, UUSC

The restaurant industry: the scoopers, the servers, the dishwashers, the cooks, provide six of our country's 10 lowest paying jobs. Over half (five million +) of all these workers are women, two million of them mothers, one million of them single mothers.

This week my colleague, Kara Smith, who does advocacy and mobilization work for our sister UU associational partner, the [UU Service Committee](#), is on Capitol Hill in Washington DC, along with hundreds

of workers and many organizations that support raising both the regular minimum wage and the minimum wage paid to tipped workers. The UU Women's Federation is part of this effort.

She is urging us to call our US Senators TODAY (or as soon as possible at 866-204-2557 to urge them to vote in favor of S.1737, the Minimum Wage Fairness Act.

She warns us that “powerful detractors will try to stop a raise to the minimum wage.”

But she reminds us that we have the moral power and strength in numbers.

As women.

April 4, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Snowy Protest Outside Supreme Court

... and the Face of Pro-Choice 2014 This past Tuesday morning I had the opportunity to stand with hundreds of others in a freak late March full out snowstorm (wet cold and pelting) in Washington DC to protest the case brought by Hobby Lobby, a national chain of craft stores, and another company, claiming that as corporations their religious rights are being violated when the Affordable Care Act (ACA) insurance plans are required to cover contraception at no cost. This assumes that corporations should be afforded the same protected status as individuals. As one news article explained, besides invoking—as corporations—First Amendment provisions that guarantees the right to freely exercise religious beliefs, in the brief they filed they also claim protection under the 1933 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which provides religious practitioners protection against government intrusion. It has been revealed that prior to the passage of a national health insurance act; Hobby Lobby's health plan had included access to contraceptive services. The company could also have simply paid a modest tax if it had wanted to opt out of the insurance requirement. A scan of blogs and vents in daily papers demonstrates the disbelief and outrage evoked by these efforts to deny individual choice. Companies do NOT have religious beliefs, people do, one person pointed out. Do employees of Hobby Lobby (and Conestoga Wood Specialties, a small firm owned by a Mennonite family) require a statement of faith prior to hire? Another writer asked. Thank you Hobby Lobby, you just sent me to Michael's for my Easter crafts, was another common response. The potential impact of this case—should the nine Justices vote in favor of the companies—is huge: potentially impacting many other areas in which beliefs of a private corporation (the individuals who own it) will supersede the beliefs of the women and men who are their employees. At the very least the 13,000 employees of Hobby Lobby will be immediately impacted by a favorable vote. Many of them reproductive age women. The pro-reproductive justice protesters who gathered Tuesday morning in the cold included a number of Unitarian Universalists, both local and from around the country. What I saw was a crowd that tilted young: women and their male allies, quite a few of them wearing pink wool hats provided by Planned Parenthood (founded by Unitarian Margaret Sanger). The face of choice in 2014 is—or at least was that day—an engaged, determined cohort of the Americans who will be directly affected by any attempt to turn back the clock on birth control.

March 28, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## [A Real Scandal](#)

A confession: my husband and I (after reading so many rave postings on Facebook by a well-respected UU sister in ministry), have just finished binge watching 40 episodes of the TV program “Scandal” in less than two weeks. This popular series, set in Washington D.C., is a dark and often violent picture of shadow government, White House assignations, torture, assassinations, and monumental corruption. It is engaging and well-acted. It is also cynical and horrifying.

It is a scandalous depiction of our democracy in action. And it is fictional.

**In the real Washington D.C. of 2014** next Tuesday (March 25), the U.S. Supreme Court will be hearing two cases challenging the Affordable Care Act’s requirement that insurance companies provide contraception, a preventive health care service, at no cost. The constitutional right to birth control was argued and won decades ago: it is financial access that is at issue here.

More than 40 for profit companies have sued the federal government because they claim their corporations must follow certain religious laws which in fact trump the health care decision making ability of their female employees. If they work for these companies, contraceptive coverage should not be an option. The [cases under consideration](#) by the Court have been brought by Hobby Lobby Inc. (that national chain which sells crafting supplies) and Conestoga Wood Specialties.

This is a real scandal, a situation that should be causing great public outrage as yet another effort to turn back the clock on reproductive justice. This effort to give corporations greater voice in health care decisions than the women who work for them would do just this.

The UU Women’s Federation has been un-wavering and unremitting in its support for contraception — both available and accessible — as a basic human right. We join the Unitarian Universalist Association and other allies in urging the Supreme Court to uphold the rights of women to choose preventive birth control services without economic barriers, and in the process to maintain religious liberty, equality, and economic security.

I will be in D.C. for the hearing: for the [rally](#) that morning and to witness the proceedings.

I urge UUWF members and friends to speak out in the ways available to us, and to be with me in body or spirit. To end this scandal.

March 19, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## Law and Order for Special Victims Becomes Real



Actress, prosecutor push for rape kit backlog solution: Actress Mariska Hargitay of 'Law & Order SVU' and Wayne County Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy speak on the proposed sexual assault kit evidence submission act.

A recent Associated Press story about the fact that possibly hundreds of thousands of untested rape kits across the country may finally be processed reminded me of the many episodes on the long lived television series “Law and Order: Special Victims Unit” where the lack of this evidence leads to dead ends in solving these crimes, most often against women and girls. And how frustrated and indignant the small screen detectives get, including Officer Olivia Benson, played by veteran actress Mariska Hargitay. The article revealed that in Memphis Tennessee alone there are more than 12,000 kits, among them kits from the 1980’s, and in the state of Texas more than 16,000, as the reporter Lucas L. Johnson 11 writes, “collecting dust in police evidence rooms.” Finally, however, there seems to be some movement in at least 17 states to do something about this, with various proposals meant to right this wrong against victims: measures requiring law enforcement agencies to analyze rape kits in a certain amount of time; bills that if passed would at least require an inventory to be done of those still untested. To get a handle on how many there are.

One advocacy agency for rape victims has estimated that there are about 400,000 untested kits nationwide, delaying prosecution, making it often futile in states like Tennessee to get a guilty verdict at all, since there is an eight year statute of limitation on rape cases. Women who have been raped, and who then go through the thorough and often traumatizing forensic rape exam too often then learn that nothing will result from this process, that their cases remain open and are even dropped.

Last year, Congress recognized this injustice, this double victimization, by passing the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Act (SAFER), which calls for at least collecting reliable data on the status of all of this evidence and establishing better standards for the tracking, storage and use of DNA evidence in

cases of sexual violence. The federal government is also now providing some funding to the states to help cover the costs of testing.

It turns out that actress who plays the special victims unit investigator has taken on the matter of untested rape kits as a real life advocate, lending her name and her voice. Hargitay held a news conference in Detroit Monday to raise awareness about the backlog of rape kits across the state, which are unable to be processed because the county prosecutor's office is "severely understaffed" due to budget cuts, the [Detroit News](#) reports.

Some of the more than 10,000 rape kits that remain unprocessed in the county are from 25 years ago, past the statute of limitations.

Now Hargitay and her organization, the [Joyful Heart Foundation](#), are stepping in to help with the backlog issue – which the actress described in Monday's news conference as "the clearest and most shocking demonstration of how we regard these crimes in our country." "Every day in the United States women and men take the courageous step of reporting their rape to the police," Hargitay said Monday, according to the AP. "And because of what those individuals have suffered, their bodies are crime scenes. They're living, breathing, feeling crime scenes from which doctors and nurses collect evidence in a sexual assault collection kit."

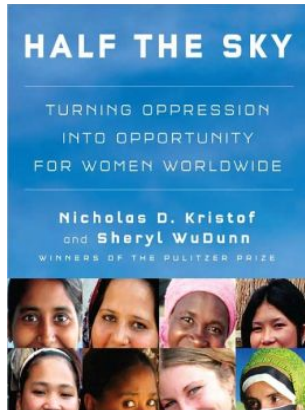
Reproductive Justice includes the safety of women and girls, and sexual assault, especially abuse and assault without justice for the victim, is egregious.

Check up on what is happening in your state and let us know so we can continue to bear witness.

March 11, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## International Women's Day and Half the Sky



### Half the Sky

It was during the millennial celebrations at Agnes Scott College, the small all women's college near our home, that I purchased a bright red t-shirt with black Chinese lettering and underneath it that ancient proverb: "Women are Half the Sky," made popular by Mao Tse-tung. I loved the sentiment: its bold simplicity. The president of the college then was a China scholar, in fact she returned to China after her time there. This t-shirt and this campaign to lift up women's power and rights was a natural for her, and for this college that has so much diversity and quite a few international students and scholars.

Over the years of wearing it, often to the gym, I occasionally have been given withering looks for wearing a communist quote on my chest, or comments about how out of reach equality is for women in China, even today. It may not be great, admits Zhang Yue, host of a popular women's talk show there for many years, but, she reminds us, of the five goals laid out for women a hundred years ago: "Abolish foot binding, educate girls, free marriage, a job, and equality with men, we got the first four. But not the last one."

This is a good deal more than the women who are half the sky in so many other countries around the world.

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wu Dunn, a Pulitzer Prize winning married couple of journalists, have made both the saying and the cause of protecting and liberating women and girls much more well known, first with their book published several years ago, then the television documentary, and their educational foundation called, appropriately, [Half the Sky](#).

They argue that while in the wealthy countries of the West, discrimination is usually a matter of unequal pay or unfunded sports teams or unwanted touching from a boss, in contrast, much of the world's discrimination is lethal.

While this assumption underplays the real pain and suffering women and girls still suffer due to battering, lack of access to reproductive health care, and increasingly cavalier attitudes towards sexual abuse and rape, their point is one of severity and scale.

The Chinese moderator who defended the status of women in her country, downplayed the bias still against girl babies in her country, how 39,000 baby girls die each year because their parents do not give them the same medical attention as boys receive — and that's just in the first year of life.

In India, wife burning to punish a woman for an inadequate dowry or to eliminate her so a man can remarry still takes place approximately once every two hours.

Forced weddings and honor killings still take place in communities in England and in the United States.

In Pakistan, women and girls are still doused with kerosene or acid for perceived acts of disobedience.

Almost two million women disappear every year worldwide, some to human trafficking, others a mystery.

Gender violence is one of the world's most common human rights abuses, Kristof often reminds us in his regular columns in the New York Times. Women worldwide are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of cancer, malaria, war, and traffic accidents combined. More girls, the authors wrote, were killed in the last 50 years, precisely because they were girls, than men killed in all the wars of the 20th century. More girls are killed in this routine gendercide in one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the past century.

Every day in newspapers and on the Internet we can learn stories about acts of discrimination and violence against women: a brutal attempted honor killing in Afghanistan; the gang rape in India that sparked widespread and continuous protests; attacks and murders of famous and unknown women in South Africa; women's marches against "virginity" tests in Egypt; teenagers sold into prostitution in Haiti; a 12-year-old girl forced to marry in Kenya to pay off her father's debts.

Every day there are ways to act to help women and girls: to emancipate them and flight global poverty, as we are urged, by unlocking women's power as economic catalysts. By giving to organizations that work to empower girls through supporting school lunches or paying for iodized salt to prevent brain damage in female fetuses; sponsoring individual women; joining citizen advocacy networks.

In researching their book, the authors visited Indian brothels to see the 21st century slave trade of women and girls, an estimated three million women worldwide, who are in effect the property of another person and in many cases could be killed by their owner with impunity. They are being rescued in some cases by organizations willing to fight this sex slavery by pressuring local police and through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which has at least created some awareness.

They visited a school for girls in Pakistan, and a women's welfare league. They visited reproductive health clinics and micro credit projects. They saw for themselves small but impactful solutions to some of the larger problems. Building schools is good, they agree, but sometimes just making sure that adolescent girls can go to school during their periods (with sanitary facilities) or introducing cable television with soap operas geared toward both entertainment and enlightenment of women and girls can make a big difference in education and self-worth.

Dining for Women chapters in local congregations are dinner-giving circles where members dine in and give the money they would have spent for a meal out to programs benefiting women, sending funds to international groups with a commitment to lifting women and girls out of poverty and misery.

Both UUA associate organizations are working to stop the exploitation and oppression of women and girls, the Women's Federation with grants to groups in this country primarily, including billboards warning against sexual trafficking, and sympathetic counseling lines for women who are seeking abortions; and the UU Service Committee ([UUSC](#)) working in partnerships abroad.

The Service committee has helped support the Rock Women's Group in Kenya, teaching impoverished parents and students the skills they need to take control of their own lives, protecting them from trafficking and dangerous forms of labor that often thrive during economic down times.

In Port-au-Prince, Haiti, they helped Construct Camp Oasis, a home and school that is providing a safe haven for 40 girls orphaned by the catastrophic earthquake. With a secure place to live, these girls will be far less likely to become victims of gender-based violence.

These missional organizations, grounded in our principles, are enabling us all to live out our values of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, regardless of gender, and justice and compassion in human relations.

My colleague, The Rev William Schulz, President of UUSC, believes that the exploitation of women has played such a defining role in societies around the world; it might be called civilization's original sin. And he tells us that we can never achieve a truly just world until we finally expiate that sin. As do I.

This International Women's Day and all year round.

March 6, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## She's Going Places

A full page advertisement in our daily newspaper by a major Japanese car manufacturer features a young girl in the passenger seat. This girl, the ad predicts, will grow five inches, letter in volleyball, major in economics, marry a man with freckles, have a career she loves, have two girls “ she loves way, way more,” and smile more than frown.

A girl who is going places and who this automaker would like to help get there safely. Presumably because the car in which she is now belted securely in the back seat and someday may drive is well made and equipped to sustain any fender bender or even more serious collision that comes her way. It is a clever marketing piece, aimed at the fiercely protective current generation of Leaning In mothers (and fathers as well) who want the best for their daughters in a world where there's fluoride in the water and better equipped vehicles than just a few years ago.

When my daughter was around the age of that girl in the ad, I was living a split life— like so many women: spending my days working for Planned Parenthood in the area of community, media and government relations; and at night & on the weekends in another role as a wife and mother of three, one of them just a baby. Working also part-time as a freelance writer covering the arts and reflecting on themes of family and parenting, I wrote many columns, many inches of copy in those years about the advantages of cooperative nursery schools and the relative merits of cloth vs. paper-and-plastic diapers.

It was 1987, the first year of an anti-choice full-on assault by a group that called itself Operation Rescue, founded by a former used car salesman, who dropped out to sell his brand of venomous rhetoric. I was never really off work, expected to be ready at any moment to get a call or a page letting me know that protestors had shown up at one of our clinics on a day when abortions were being performed. If so, I had to be there to handle the press and help out with the efforts to shield the women seeking our medical services from the invective about baby murderers, to try to keep them from harm as the growing ranks of demonstrators began storming the entrances, pushing their way into waiting rooms and beyond.

The two sides of my life could seem so separate from each other: my very ordinary Saturday and Sunday family life and then the ugliness and even danger of those workday invasion scenes. The job I had that made the reproductive “wars” very real, the right to abortion and contraception so conditional, could seem almost completely disconnected from our daily domestic life.

A life of pediatricians and playgrounds and pony rides.

So I do understand that another and another generation of mothers and other caregivers can feel inclined to check out of the ongoing movement for reproductive justice even as they are genuinely grateful for and committed to the notions of personal choice in sexuality, and loved and wanted children.

My daughter is now the mother of a long awaited, planned and much anticipated 11 month old baby girl. A baby with a premium car seat, baby lock doors, and cautious parents while driving.

This daughter of mine recalls spending some time with me as I managed one invasion crisis or another, some sense of my years with Planned Parenthood as more than abstract, as more than just what her mother did to pay the rent and buy groceries. She was unfortunately exposed, as was her older brother, to jeers and taunts and trespass.

What she may or may not know is what has been happening in that charged arena in those years since I moved on to other advocacy work on behalf of women and girls, and then professional ministry. She may not know, just as I was not fully aware, is that just last year (2013) alone, 18 states passed new laws restricting abortion, while another 14 threatened to do so. That the reproductive rights and access to essential medical care action is mostly being played out at the local level, and most of it is not good.

I sometimes, not often enough perhaps, remind myself, as should we all, that the Roe v Wade court decision holding that abortion shall be legal and safe (and hopefully increasingly rare) in this country, issued the year before my female child was born, is increasingly ineffectual in the face of these chip-away laws that make it harder every day to exercise that right at all.

That my daughter's daughter — my precious granddaughter — needs us more than ever to work to insure that her life and her choices be held safe in this way as well.

February 19, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)

## The State of the Union and Reproductive Justice

Monica Simpson, Executive Director of SisterSong



The conversation I had with SisterSong Executive Director Monica Simpson recently was wide-ranging, focusing first on the intersection between the work of her organization in promoting reproductive justice, especially for women of color, and the Moral Monday movement. This was just before the Moral March in Raleigh last Saturday which attracted somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 participants, including around 1,000 UUs, many of them in the bright yellow Standing on the Side of Love colors. The policy agenda in that state—and now beyond—is multi-faceted, including access to healthcare for low income women and women’s rights in general. We agreed that the focus on these issues, in addition to dismantling highly discriminatory voter ID laws, enhances and augments our mutual work.

Our talk came just following the State of the Union address, lauded for its front and center acknowledgment that all of us benefit when the status of women is improved. President Obama emphasized that ‘women make up about half our workforce’ but still face pay and pregnancy discrimination, as well as ‘Mad Men’-era workplace policies. We agreed that this emphasis on bread and butter concerns of women (literally): a raise in the minimum wage; equal pay for equal work; and again access to comprehensive healthcare offers “lots of hope for this year,” as Monica commented.

We also agreed on what was missing: any mention of the threats to access to birth control and abortion that have only redoubled in the past year. In fact the next day, as reported in the New York Times, the House of Representatives voted to impose tighter restrictions on federal payments for abortions. The vote on HR 7 was 227-188, mainly along party lines. It contains language similar to the Hyde Amendment, the law first passed in 1977. This measure would make what is an annually renewed provision permanent.

As reporter Jeremy Peters observed in his coverage of this vote, the timing was telling. He pointed out that the House leadership chose to “bring the measure up on the day when all of Washington and much of the news was consumed” with covering President Obama’s address, an address that was silent on this development, as well as the upcoming Supreme Court hearing on two cases brought by secular non-profit corporations seeking an exemption, based on their religious beliefs, from the requirement that employers’ health plans cover the full range of contraceptive services without a co-pay under the Affordable Healthcare Act.

The Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation (UUWF) has joined an effort with national coalition partners, including the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) to oppose the House bill on abortion funding and has been a signee on an amicus brief asking the Court to reject the claims of Conestoga Wood Specialties and Hobby Lobby that their religious freedom is being violated by this insurance coverage, trumping the rights of their employees to act according to their own faith beliefs and individual consciences.

There are still opportunities ahead for the President to use his bully pulpit to weigh in as well on these very real threats to healthcare access—and the equal status of women he so eloquently endorsed.

February 12, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)



## [A Conversation with SisterSong's Monica Simpson](#)

I first met Monica Simpson a year ago for lunch at a Panera Bread Company café in Atlanta, over black bean soup and salads. I was excited to be with her as we planned for a Sunday morning sermon she would be delivering at my then congregation. Her appearance would be especially timely following the selection of Reproductive Justice as the [Congregational Study/Action](#) issue over the next several years and the role her organization [Sistersong](#) (based in Atlanta) had played and will play in redefining and expanding our work in this arena. She is the executive director, having come to work there following years of working in non-profit social change organizations.



The Sistersong Collective was formed in 1997 and initially funded by the Ford Foundation to educate women of color and policy makers on reproductive and sexual health and rights, and to work towards the access of health services, information and resources that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Through her activism and organizational work, Monica has become a nationally sought-after facilitator and organizer. She has been featured in many publications for her activism, and has written many articles on LGBT issues, philanthropy and activism. Monica is a founder for Charlotte's first Black Gay Pride Celebration, and Charlotte's African American Giving Circle. She also sits on the board for Resource Generation and the Fund for Southern Communities.

Her pulpit visit was electrifying and illuminating, as she shared her own story growing up in the South, coming out as a lesbian in a conservative environment, and her own understanding of what reproductive justice is, a term coined a decade ago to describe a framework for her work and our work together that encompasses far more than the provision of services to individuals, "reproductive health" or "reproductive rights," through protecting a woman's legal right to reproductive health care services, particularly abortion.

She eloquently laid out what "reproductive justice" entails: as described in the excellent curriculum developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association [www.uua.org/reproductive/index/shtml](http://www.uua.org/reproductive/index/shtml), a focus on the social inequalities that "shape the lives of marginalized women, the exploitation of women, girls and others through their reproduction, labor and sexuality. Success would mean that children are raised in safe and healthy environments; that pregnancies are planned and healthy; that unwanted pregnancies are ended or avoided; and that their sexuality can be expressed authentically and without fear.

After her remarks to the Atlanta congregation, more than 50 individuals, women and men, signed up for future work in reproductive justice as they now understood it.

Monica and I have found each other again: in Washington DC during the gathering of women's groups working for fair and comprehensive immigration reform, shining the light on the plight of undocumented mothers separated from their children and other injustices under the existing system. We walked the long halls of the Senate and House office buildings together.

Last week we both showed up for the first Moral Monday in Georgia, modeled after weekly demonstrations in North Carolina last year. (and the nationally publicized mass Moral March next Saturday in Raleigh). The initial Atlanta gathering—and the next one—focused on Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, which if adopted in all of the states could provide coverage for an additional 4.5 million lower income women. Georgia is one of the states whose governor has refused to participate.

Monica was not only present, she was front and center, one of the lead off speakers at the rally, which attracted around 200 people, who stood in a freezing hard rain. I caught up with her by phone to talk about the link between the Moral Monday movement and the reproductive justice work that the UUWF and the UUA share with Sistersong.

The connection is “a huge deal,” she said unhesitatingly. “The communities where this expansion is most important are communities of color”.

This federally subsidized healthcare impacts a woman's right to parent children in healthy and sustainable ways, let alone caring for our own bodies, she noted.

While access to healthcare has been highlighted in Georgia's Moral Mondays, in North Carolina, the focus has been on voter ID laws, asking for repeal of measures passed there that have discouraged and disenfranchised women and men of color and young people, primary constituents of and advocates for the services, rights and conditions necessary for fully realizing reproductive justice.

The larger stage, the number of groups, the energy of Moral Monday will only strengthen and magnify this effort.

*Next week: A continuation of the conversation with Monica Simpson with a look at the State of the Union Address by President Obama.*

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## [A Visit to the National Archives](#)



January 15th is the actual birthday of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., officially celebrated the third Monday of January in many communities and congregations in a variety of ways: some focusing on his legacy of work in securing civil rights for African Americans; others on his nonviolent approach to acts of disobedience; others on his opposition to unjust war, or his later life interest in economic justice issues. King was preparing for a Poor People's March on Washington DC when he was gunned down in Memphis, the site of a sanitation worker's march for better pay and other labor issues.

There was some critique during his living years of the lack of visible (or acknowledged) leadership of women in these initiatives. The particular concerns of women around human rights have been viewed as being overlooked then, and not particularly the focus of observances honoring his legacy in the years that have followed.

Not so in 2014.

A recent family visit to the [National Archives](#) in Washington DC included our first time seeing the new more expansive and nuanced permanent exhibit displaying the “[Records of Rights](#)”, highlighting the parallel and intersecting civil rights struggles of African Americans, [women](#), and immigrants.

In a fresh and powerful way, materials in this major gallery chronicle women's efforts to gain the full rights of citizens and achieve economic self-determination. Original petitions for—and against—granting the right for women to vote complement lesser-known facets of our nation's history. “Repatriation oaths” reveal that, during the early 20th century, women derived their citizenship from their husbands, and marrying a man who wasn't a citizen meant the loss of their rights as Americans. Only when they divorced or became widows were these women allowed to “repatriate” and become Americans again. Even as late as the 1970s, women had difficulties obtaining mortgages and credit on their own. This section of the exhibition also explores the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment and the success of Title IX, which ensured equal opportunities in education for women.

For the past 20 years, Atlanta—where he was born, where he preached from the pulpit of Ebenezer Baptist Church, and where the MLK Historical site and District are located—has been my home. The King holiday weekend features concerts, worship services, marches, a day of service and other regular events memorializing his life, mourning his violent and untimely death; and encouraging ways to keep his legacy alive. This year playwright [Eve Ensler](#) ( “[The Vagina Monologues](#)”) is being honored at the [Salute to Greatness](#) dinner here for her campaign to stop violence against women.

[King Center](#) CEO Bernice King (his daughter) held a press conference announcing Ensler's selection as a “ no-brainer,” saying that lifting her up as an embodiment of her father's philosophy and the center's vision “ is very consistent with the work we are doing.” Naming her and her worldwide [One Billion Rising](#) movement turns the focus of the King Center to the issue of rape and

other violence against women and girls and confirms, as Bernice King reminds us, that women's rights and civil rights are indeed one and the same.

January 8, 2014 / [Rev. Marti Keller](#) / [Blog](#)