

the communicator

THE NEWSLETTER OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST WOMEN'S FEDERATION

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Meet the New UUWF Clara Barton Intern



"It's so exciting to start my work here at the beginning of the new administration," comments Orelia Busch, the new UUWF Clara Barton Legislative Assistant/Intern for Women's Issues. The

fourth young woman to take up this position, she comes to us after two years with the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso, West Africa, where her work supported girls' and women's rights to education and economic independence.

Originally from Madison, WI, Orelia found Unitarian Universalism in high school and became an active leader of the Young Adult and Campus Ministry group. In 2004 she received an interdisciplinary degree in Psychology, Human Development, and Women's Studies from the University of Wisconsin. Her background has given her experience in working with diverse campus, religious, and community-based organizations to promote understanding and human rights in the areas of gender, sexuality, and education.

The UUWF Clara Barton Internship was established in 2002 in the UUA's Washington Office by UUWF's \$200,000 donation and assistance raising a matching amount for the permanent endowment funding the internship. Read more about Orelia at www.uuwf.org.

First Marjorie Bowers-Wheatley Grants Awarded

Our new grants program supports aspirants to the UU ministry who identify as women of color, Latina or Hispanic. The 2009 recipients are Natalie Maxwell Fenimore, Gaithersburg, MD; Dr. Denise Hall, Greeley, CO; Kathleen McGregor, Pasadena, CA; and Jodi Tharan, El Cerrito, CA. Both the recipients and the program will be featured in a UUWF workshop at this year's General Assembly and in the next issue of the *Communicator*.

UUA Presidential Candidates Speak Out on Issues Unique to Women

This June in Salt Lake City our Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly will vote on our next president, a role that includes both executive functions as well as being the voice of our liberal religious faith tradition in the wider world. As one of the UUA's only three associate member groups, the UUWF acts as a powerful force for the women in our movement, advancing justice for women through education and advocacy and promoting spiritual growth through the advancement of religious feminisms. The challenge to the UUWF board is how we might best represent our constituency during campaigns for UUA Office.

At our March 2008 meeting, it was the consensus of the board that we consider endorsing candidates only when approached, and that we devote some space in an upcoming *Communicator* to interviews with the candidates, based on issues unique to women. As of press time, we had not been asked by either candidate for a formal endorsement. The following are their responses to the three main questions they were asked, both in written form and in conversations with the board during our meeting in February 2009.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman First Unitarian Church Dallas, TX



How have feminist theologies/theologies impacted our living liberal religious tradition?

For a whole generation of women, the "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" curriculum by Shirley Ann

Ranck was a foundational, life-changing work. For many women it marked the first time they could gather to talk about religion in words, images, and rituals that reflected their own experience. Many, many women were empowered to find their own religious path in that time.

We also reclaimed our own liberal religious heritage of women ministers when we began to honor the women of the Iowa Sisterhood who founded and settled into churches in the Ohio Valley, their lives restored to us through historians such as Cynthia Grant Tucker. We regained the model of ministry that these women represented: tenacious, faithful, and institutionally successful. In our own time we have seen women ministers recognize again the call that had long been stifled both by our culture and by our own tradition.

Rev. Peter Morales Jefferson Unitarian Church Golden, CO



How have feminist theologies/theologies impacted our living liberal religious tradition?

The effect of feminist theologies/theologies has been so pervasive that we often don't recognize the source.

There are some obvious examples: women's spirituality groups, inclusive language, the rise of earth-based ritual and courses like "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven."

The most important effects are less obvious, for they permeate the practice of congregational life – worship, pastoral care, religious education and decision making. Perhaps the most important contributions have been in three areas: emphasis on the wholeness of human experience, a focus on the sanctity of human relationships and a new view of power.

Ours is a tradition that easily falls into the mistake of overemphasizing the intellectual and rational. Feminist perspectives provide an important corrective, emphasizing the affective, the emotional, the experiential.

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Thanking Our Contributors

We extend a heartfelt "thank you" to all those who contributed generous donations and pledges between January 1 and December 31, 2008.

Legacy Circle

We are pleased to receive word from Phyllis Fairman, Minneapolis, MN and Mary-Ella Holst, New York, NY, that they have included UUWF in their planned giving as the beneficiary of annuities; we gratefully acknowledge a generous bequest from the late Alice Wallace, San Francisco, CA.

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UUA Presidential Candidates

HALLMAN, CONT. FROM PAGE 1

Liberal religious women and men began to consider the possibilities of “God as woman,” “Goddess” or “Sophia” as images for transcendent qualities which had been underrepresented in our living tradition. What some feared would be the ‘feminization’ of our faith, has become instead a driving force in modern time, opening us to visions of the divine in feminine terms.

On a very practical level, our UUA Washington Office has a Women’s Issues Internship, supported by the gifts of many people who value and understand the importance of a liberal religious voice on women’s issues with a continued presence on the Hill. In addition, thanks to grants for feminist theological study, our movement is already reaping benefits in unique scholarship by and about women.

The impact of all this has been more profound than I can state here. The feminine face and voice of the Holy is found in our hymns, our readings, our theology, and its power is both spoken and lived, as evidenced by the number of women in our ministry and lay leadership. Blessed be.

What is your appraisal of the status of our women in the UU ministry (or other religious professionals)?

As one of the first women to serve a large church in our tradition as Senior Minister,

MORALES, CONT. FROM PAGE 1

The feminist emphasis on the relational is transforming congregational life. I see its influence in small group ministry, in pastoral care, in counseling, in fellowship activities. The emphasis on the relational shapes youth religious education and efforts to weave connections among the generations.

Our view of power has been reframed by feminist perspectives. Our emphasis on power as something shared (“power with”) versus hierarchy (“power over”) emerges from feminism. We are more likely to seek consensus, more likely to make certain that everyone is heard, because of feminism.

Modern Unitarian Universalism, both in theory and in practice, is no longer imaginable without feminist thinking.

I can say without reservation that the status of women in the UU ministry has dramatically improved.

Search Committees now are, by and large, open to women and I am greatly encouraged by the talent and energy of the women who are choosing our ministry as their vocation.

Like the larger society, however, we have yet to figure out how to support women in the hard duties of ministry while tending their growing families. Even in the best of situations, women ministers still find the work of ministry and child rearing very difficult to manage.

In addition, the status of our Religious Educators, while improved, still reflects the attitude of many congregations that work with children is “peripheral.” Our Renaissance Modules have made it possible for women to grow in depth and skills while staying close to their current congregations, and the certification of Religious Educators is an important step in raising the status of religious educators in our congregations and retaining our best talent. Yet salaries continue to lag, and turnover continues to be high. We have work still to do.

What do you believe are the key justice issues facing women, and what should be our Association’s response?

What is your appraisal of the status of women in the UU ministry (or other religious professionals)?

The progress of women in our ministry has been stunning. We now have more women than men in ministry. The majority of newly fellowshiped ministers are women. Women ministers lead some of our largest congregations. Any list of our most prominent ministers includes many women.

However, much remains to be done. Most large churches still have male senior ministers. Women are still more likely to serve part time and in our lowest paying positions. The status of community ministers, many of them women, continues to be below other categories of ministry.

Equal pay for equal work. We must ensure that our own congregations address this issue in the ways they pay childcare workers, religious educators, and other positions in which many women work for our congregations.

Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights. We must continue to lobby for women’s reproductive health and rights through our Washington office and through the UU/UN office. It is vital that we facilitate the building of coalitions with other women’s organizations in our communities to make sure that abortion is available and safe, and that reproductive health care is available and convenient, especially for the poor. In addition, we must continue to support those people in our congregations who are providing these services and who often feel under siege.

Economic Resources. We must encourage congregations to form micro-lending groups to assist women with the capital they need to start businesses and become self-sufficient, both in our own country and globally. It’s just as important for all of us to be a witness to, and an advocate for women’s philanthropy, wherever it occurs in our congregations. Finally, we must lift up the possibilities of supporting programs for women and girls in our communities.

My major area of concern for women serving our movement is the situation of our religious educators. While we have made progress in this area, religious educators, the vast majority of them women, typically feel they are not respected and are not treated as colleagues by parish ministers. Indeed, the problem of the relationship between parish minister and female religious educator is so pervasive that it needs an institutional response. I believe the UUA, LREDA and the UUMA should work together to develop a program to improve parish minister/religious educator collaboration.

What do you believe are the key justice issues facing women, and what should be the Association’s response?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Three by Three: Responses to Questions Posed to Candidates for UUA Presidency

by Rev. Marti Keller
Vice President/Communications

The *Communicator* put the same three questions we posed to the candidates for the UUA presidency to three women with expertise and passion around the issues we focused on: religious feminisms, UU women in professional ministry, and public policy advocacy. Their responses are not presented as counterpoints to the candidates' answers. Rather, we hope they help inform the conversation and the right of individual conscience of all those with a stake in this election. Each woman was asked a particular question, in light of the more than 30 years since the historic UUA Women and Religion Resolution was adopted, and looking ahead to the next four to eight years – the term of office of the future head of the UUA.

Rev. Elizabeth Lerner: How have feminist theologies/theologies impacted our living liberal religious tradition and where do we go from here?



Rev. Lerner is minister of the UU Church of Silver Spring, MD. With the Church of the Larger Fellowship, she was awarded a Margaret Fuller Grant in 2008 to develop “Ancient Roots:

The Feminist face of Western Religion,” a course offering a new chance for UU women and men around the world to connect their own lives and spirituality with the history of important female figures in ancient religion, in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and women religious leaders from the modern Western world. The 12-session course has been offered through CLF.

She sees a role for the UUA leadership in calling for and actively promoting a maturing religious education program, deepening and broadening opportunities across age and gender, as well as race and ethnicity, embedding religious feminisms within our living faith tradition:

“Women’s theology is still seen as a women’s issue, and I hope it will change. It started out as a sense of exclusivism, an assumption that men wouldn’t be motivated or interested or appropriate to the conversation. My hope would be that the UUA would encourage and

create programming that made room for men to attend and be part of this.”

After all, she notes, the original society that honored women as Goddess and Priestess were not exclusively female. “There are interesting lessons that cross gender lines, not only women’s experiences but men’s experiences.”

She also invites the feminist movement in religion to be more careful about how we categorize women’s history in religion. We sometimes gloss over aspects that might be troublesome, she observes. We need to be careful about the difference between theory and fact.

Rev. Diane Miller: What is your appraisal of the status of women in the UU ministry (or other religious professionals)?



Rev. Miller is minister of the First Religious Society in Carlisle, MA. Prior to that she managed the Department of Ministry for the UUA, was herself a candidate for the

president of the UUA, and served on the committee which crafted our Principles and Purposes.

Diane sees a huge change in the presence and status of women in professional ministry since her ordination, from very few to over 50 percent. She also reminds us that it has not been so very long that this shift occurred, and that there are still lags and gaps.

She recalls that when she was pregnant in 1981, she called the UUA to ask what the policy was in this circumstance. She was told she was the first full-time, settled minister to have a baby while serving a congregation. At that time, other women in ministry were coming into the professional ministry after that point in their lives. Prior to her query, the UUA had not confronted the particular issues surrounding pregnancy, birth and mothering.

“We (the UUA) move with the culture and aren’t different from it,” she notes. “We need to pay attention to what is happening and the institution needs to respond.”

There has been a tendency to assume that the particular issues for women in our ministry have been handled, but she sees that within our association and its institutions feminism “has been devalued... Very pervasive stereotypes still exist.” There is still evidence that larger leadership opportunities are fewer for women and that salary compensation is still problematic.

Overall, she believes, the leadership of the UUA, including the new president, needs to continue to address and monitor issues around equity for women.

Susan Leslie, Director of the UUA Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness: What do you believe are the key justice issues facing women, and what should be our Association’s response?



Among the legislative objectives developed for 2009-2010 by the UUA Office of Advocacy are funding of comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education, and increased access to

abortion and contraception. Susan sees the new, progressive administration in Washington as an opportunity to be even more actively pro- health and choice, through the lens of anti-oppression since women of color and low-income women have a disproportionate lack of access. Hopefully, this can be an action issue of the month next year.

How much focus and resources are given these and other issues for women depends in part whether these are issues the UUA president cares about, Susan says, and whether there are partnerships and collaborations available to work on these concerns, including state legislative networks and action groups who are ready to mobilize within our congregations.

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UUWomen

*Advancing justice for women
through education and advocacy*

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I will assume that the question targets women in America. The justice issues facing women in developing countries are a topic requiring a far longer answer. There will be times, however, when the president's prophetic voice will need to be raised in response to issues facing women in the world.

The issues facing women living in and near our congregations are related to the larger issues of race, class and culture in America. The major issues are a familiar litany: reproductive rights, economic exploitation, education, health care and civil marriage.

These issues confront all women, but the effects on women of color and the poor are much greater. Undocumented Latina women face separation from their children. All women of color face economic exploitation.

Reproductive choices are much more limited for the poor.

Justice issues facing women should be part of the UUA's comprehensive effort to be a prophetic voice speaking out against all injustice. At the local level, we need to become better partners with our congregations. We need to help congregations act to counter the injustices that face them in their particular contexts. The situations are different in Cleveland and in Tucson, in Seattle and Atlanta.

Two principles should guide us. First, we should include the justice issues facing women part of the Association's comprehensive work in public witness and social action. Second, we should partner with congregations in a way that helps them speak and act in response to their unique contexts.