

the communicator

THE NEWSLETTER OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST WOMEN'S FEDERATION

December, 2008 | Vol 26, Issue 3

UUWF Receives 3rd Grant

For the third year in a row, UUWF is the recipient of a generous \$25,000 grant from the Veatch Program of the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY. This renewal grant is a follow-up to those awarded to us previously and are given in recognition of the Federation's role in furthering and strengthening Unitarian Universalism.

Grant Proposal Deadline Extended

As previously announced on our website and elsewhere, the UUWF board has extended the proposal deadline for the 2009 cycle of both our Equity and Justice and Margaret Fuller Grants Programs from October 15, 2008, to March 15, 2009. March 15 will then become the new deadline for future funding cycles.

IRA Charitable Rollover Renewed Through 2009

Did you know that if you are age 70.5 or above, you can now make gifts to the UUWF, your congregation, the UUA, or other UU entities directly from your IRA – without including the IRA withdrawal in your taxable income? This timely provision will be in effect through December 31, 2009. To make a tax-free distribution, simply send a letter to your IRA custodian requesting a transfer directly from your IRA to the organization of your choice.

Mary Mercier Joins UUWF Board

Mary Mercier, of Hanson, MA, has joined the UUWF Board of Trustees as Treasure/Clerk. She has filled the position formerly held by Barbara Prairie, who rotated off the board in June after serving two two-year terms. Mary is a member of the First Parish Church in Norwell, MA.

A Faith-Based Case for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

By Meryl Baier
*Executive Director,
 Promise the Children*

Unitarian Universalists have long been vocal advocates within our own circle for effective comprehensive sexuality education in the public schools. While we can discuss the value and need at great lengths within our own religious community, given the current political climate it seems appropriate that we reiterate our commitment to comprehensive sexuality education outside this comfort zone. We need to let people, including lawmakers and the children whom we support, know that the issue of comprehensive sex education is a core belief of our faith.

This can be a slippery slope. In stating that this is a core belief of our faith, are we not bringing religion into the schools? This depends on how we frame our argument.

Consider these facts. We, as a faith, support the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act, which would establish the first-ever funding stream for medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education. This commitment was an Action of Immediate Witness at the 2007 General Assembly. Currently, there is no dedicated federal funding for comprehensive sexuality education in schools. However, from 1996 through federal fiscal year 2007, Congress committed more than \$1.4 billion dollars (through federal and state matching funds) to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Meanwhile, zero dollars went to comprehensive sex education, which includes abstinence education.

Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs reflect and promote the socially conservative "values" agenda put forward by ultraconservative members of Congress. Program guidelines explicitly prohibit any discussion of contraceptives, except for failure rates. They must



Promise the Children advocates for and with children and young people, who need to have medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education as part of the curriculum in the public schools.

teach, among other things, that "sexual activity outside of marriage may have harmful psychological and physical effects" and that "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard for all school-age children."

Failure of states to comply with these guidelines results in denial of funds. In a time where financially strapped school districts are frantically searching for program funding, these constraints are no more than federal blackmail.

It would be foolish to assume that abstinence-only programs are not religiously biased. Values-based education commonly is, and the bulk of abstinence-only education is supported by conservative religious organizations. These organizations often claim that they are "pro-family," if to imply that those who oppose their agenda are the opposite.

One could ask if we should enter that same arena with a liberal religious belief of supporting comprehensive sex education. There is a difference. While our belief is supported by a liberal religious tradition, comprehensive sex education is defined as a program that is honest, medically accurate, complete, age-appropriate and culturally sensitive. This

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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The Communicator is published by the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation and is distributed to members and other supporters in the UU community.

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What Are Women's Issues?

By Grace Garner

UUWF Clara Barton Intern for Women's Issues

As a legislative assistant in the UUA Washington Office, I plan and facilitate legislative advocacy campaigns related to reproductive health, comprehensive sexuality education and bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender (BGLT) issues.

It can be said that all issues are women's issues, which is true, but the lack of representation of women in politics, where our laws are being decided, makes it extremely important that women create their own voice. This can be done by picking out some of the most important issues that women face on a day-to-day basis and advocating for them, to ensure that our rights are respected. Access to contraception, abortion and evidence-based sexuality education are top priorities for the UUA Washington Office.

Sexuality Education

Every day our youth are being taught from abstinence-only-until marriage programs, programs that have been found to have misleading, distorted, or just plain wrong information about sex and contraception. The Waxman and Mathematica Reports found that some programs claimed "exposure to sweat and tears [are] risk factors for HIV transmission;" and that "[I]n heterosexual sex, condoms fail to prevent HIV approximately 31% of the time."

Both of these statements are false. HIV can not be transmitted through sweat and tears and condoms prevent HIV almost 100 percent of the time. Yet our government is still funding these programs even though study after study has proved they are ineffective.

It is up to us to continue to teach our youth the truth about sex and sexuality through the UUA's Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum and one-on-one conversations. We must lobby local school boards and state and federal governments to reject abstinence-only education and put in place evidence-

based comprehensive sexuality education. Our efforts this past year have led to 24 states rejecting Title V state funding of abstinence-only education programs. Every day more and more people are realizing how harmful abstinence-only education is for our youth. It is the single most life-saving issue young people are currently facing.

Abortion Rights

Abortion has been legal in the United States since 1973. From the start, anti-choice groups have been working to overturn this important right. And now, 35 years later, women are still dealing with very serious threats to our right to choose.

In August, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed a new regulation that would allow health care providers to refuse to participate in any patient treatment that they found morally objectionable. A leaked version of the regulation also included a definition of abortion that allowed life to be considered beginning at conception. This definition, which does not comply with the American Medical Association (AMA), would classify many forms of contraception as abortion.

The official version of the regulation did not include the definition of abortion, but the lack of a clear definition still leaves the reproductive health community fearful that healthcare providers and employees who are receiving HHS funding will apply their own

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

For more information on women's issues, here is a list of the organizations Grace has worked with, along with their websites:

- **Advocates for Youth:** www.advocatesforyouth.org
- **Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice:** www.rcrc.org
- **Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom:** www.syrf.org
- **Guttmacher Institute:** www.guttmacher.org
- **Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States:** www.siecus.org
- **Planned Parenthood Action Network:** www.ppaction.org/ppaction/home.html
- **Leadership Council for Civil Rights:** www.civilrights.org
- **National Organization for Women:** www.now.org
- **Legal Momentum:** www.legalmomentum.org/site/PageServer

Join the UUSC in Protecting Women & Girls in Darfur



War in Darfur has particularly targeted women and girls, who face armed attacks each time they leave their camps to find firewood, food or to work.

The genocidal war in western Sudan's Darfur region has raged for five years. Over 300,000 Darfurians have been killed, and the Sudanese military and the Janjaweed militia have forced over 2.5 million to flee their villages. The United Nations estimates that there are now 4 million people in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and protection, and over 2 million living in camps in Darfur, 80 percent of whom are women and children.

Although all civilians are in need of protection, this war has particularly targeted women and girls. They face armed attacks each time that they leave their camps to find firewood, food, or to work. The Janjaweed and Sudanese security forces have used rape and sexual violence as a deliberate strategy of war – women are attacked as a way to shame and destroy fami-

lies and communities. The violence and subsequent displacement weaken women's support networks and their access to livelihoods, even as many more of them are now heads of household, making it all the more difficult for them to survive.

The UU Service Committee has been working both on the ground and through advocacy and grassroots action to improve security for women and girls in Darfur and to provide support for concrete protection measures in and around camps.

Its work is strengthened by the efforts of local activists, who raise awareness in their community and advocate for the people of Darfur, particularly on the issue of gender-based violence.

The UUSC invites you to join its national Darfur advocacy work to ensure congressional oversight of United Nations peacekeeping measures to protect women and girls from violence. UUSC is asking that the following steps be taken:

- Women are recruited to serve as peacekeepers, translators, police officers, and human-rights monitors;
- All protection forces complete rigorous gender and human-rights training;
- All camps relying on wood-burning fuel are provided with firewood patrols;
- Gender units in the peacekeeping forces

are provided with adequate staffing and resources;

- Peacekeepers found responsible for any acts of sexual harassment, exploitation, or violence are punished.

To read more about our work on the ground and UUSC's Drumbeat for Darfur campaign, please visit <http://www.uusc.org/darfur>.

In the last few months, UUSC staff members have been meeting with members of the State Department and congressional staffers to ensure that the Union/United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) mandate to protect civilians – in particular women and girls – is fulfilled.

As our partners work on the ground and UUSC staff works behind the scenes with policymakers, we need your help to keep the pressure on.

We have distributed approximately 10,000 advocacy postcards calling for congressional oversight of the UNAMID mandate in order to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual violence.

We ask you to let policymakers know that you, too, care about protecting women and girls. If you have not ordered your cards yet, or you need more, please place your order today at http://www.uusc.org/order_drumbeat. Resources and shipping are free of charge unless rush delivery is requested.

Thank you for supporting our work to protect Darfurian women and girls.

Women's Issues,

definition of abortion to certain procedures. In September, a 30 day comment period allowed individuals and organizations to write in to HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt in regard to the regulation. Many pro-choice organizations, including the UUA Washington Office, encouraged their members to write in. Currently, HHS is reviewing all of the comments before releasing the final regulation.

The Unitarian Universalist Association's Washington Office has set clear legislative objectives for the 111th Congress to continue to support

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

women's issues. We will be advocating with a focused commitment to the funding of comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education and to increase access to abortion and contraception throughout the next two years. We look forward to working with UUs like you to continue successfully advocating for these issues. You can sign up for Advocacy News and the Women's Issues listserv at our website – uua.org/socialjustice – to stay up-to-date on these and many other important issues.

**Don't forget the
March 15 proposal
deadline for both
UUWF's Equity &
Justice and
Margaret Fuller
funding programs.
For information go to
www.uuwf.org.**

Your Donations at Work: Mentors Help Refugee Women Adapt to a New Home

This year the Priscilla Project – a program of Jericho Road Ministries, Inc., Buffalo, NY – received Equity and Justice Grant funding totaling \$6,000 – \$4,000 outright and an additional \$2,000 in matching funds. The Priscilla Project provides mentors for low-income women, most of whom are refugees driven from their homelands by war. Here's how UUWF's grant is helping to adapt to the radical changes in their lives.

Daily life is a huge challenge for the refugee women participating in the Priscilla Project, says Kathryn Halborg. “Life here is hectic and complicated. Everything is different to them, from the language to the climate.”

Kathryn, a mentor with the program, witnesses these difficulties every week when she spends time with Hawa, the Somali Bantu woman whom she mentors. Though the Priscilla Project is open to any woman struggling with life's complications, the program currently serves mostly refugee women from nine different countries. Learning to live in a totally new culture has meant radical changes for these women.

Kathryn not only spends time transporting her friend to medical appointments, she also accompanies Hawa's family to food and clothing pantries, helps them understand letters from Social Services, which they cannot read, and even brings them to LaSalle Park, where the seven children love to play.

“When I came to the U.S. through Catholic Charities,” Zena, an interpreter for the program, explains, “it was so hard to adjust to all the day-to-day things such as finding where to go for laundry, shopping, etc.”

The experience is like becoming a child again, not knowing how to do simple things for yourself or your family since everything has changed. But these women do not have the luxuries of childhood: they have bills to pay, children to raise, and all the other responsibilities of adulthood without the knowledge of the culture or even the ability to speak English.

The Priscilla Project seeks to empower these women with the tools and hope they

need to thrive in their new country. As Kathryn explains it, “In the Bible's Book of Acts, Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, were forced to leave Italy when Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. They settled in Corinth and, although refugees, offered hospitality to the apostle Paul.” Modeled after Priscilla's hospitality and strength, the program attempts to offer a hand of friendship and the warm embrace of welcome to refugee women in Buffalo.

Seeing change happen in the lives of other refugee women, Zena could not help but say, “Ever since I started interpreting for the Priscilla Project my first impression was, ‘How come this project took so long to start?’ Obviously I wish this project had existed when I arrived here. I wish I had had a mentor just to take me to the park.”

Dorothy SanGeorge, a program staff member, reminds us that “these cultural adjustments pale in comparison to the more serious hardships the women have faced.”

Sexuality Education, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

definition is based on support from the medical, educational, scientific, parental and religious community. If we support a platform that is defined within these parameters, then we cannot be at risk of promoting a religious agenda and crossing the line between church and state.

When considering the platforms of both political parties, it is important to remain a non-partisan advocate. To label it as conservative or liberal is to buy in to the divisive nature that the media loves to fuel. Regardless of party affiliation, UUs need to oppose any law that would impose specific religious views on either us or our families, especially when it involves public schools.

To keep a comprehensive sexuality education program out of the public schools is to deny our children the knowledge that they need to make responsible choices about their health as they mature. The appropriate curriculum needs to be presented in a way that maintains the guarantees of our constitution regarding religious freedom. Both

These women are refugees for a reason. Most hail from war-torn countries like Burundi, which consists of the same two warring tribes as Rwanda.

“They've endured things we can barely imagine,” Dorothy says, “but we get brief glimpses of them through a sadness in their eyes that sometimes spreads across their faces. But despite the pain, each time I see one of them, her face lights up and a warm, joyous smile welcomes me. I have a lot of respect for these refugee women.”

Another mentor, Kimberly Bray, sums up the incredible perseverance of the refugee women who have made it this far. “I cannot begin to comprehend what these women have been through, or the kind of courage and strength they have needed to survive and raise their children,” she says. “My happiest moment will be when I see that same strength and courage enable them to be confident and self-sufficient here in their new home.”

parties need to embrace the ideal of addressing the public health agenda through all avenues, including comprehensive sexuality education in our public schools.

Comprehensive sexuality education helps teens make healthy decisions, reduces the number of unintended teen pregnancies, and reduces the need for abortion. In the lower grades this program teaches awareness, appropriate sexual contact, and health and nutrition for strong bodies.

Major faith traditions representing millions of Americans support comprehensive sexuality education in public schools. The time has come for Unitarian Universalists, to speak loudly and proudly about our support for this issue. We must maintain an active dialogue with our congregations, lawmakers, neighbors, and school districts. It is imperative that we do this not only for the health and well being of our children, but for the success of the greater community regarding life-long health based on a foundation of education.

Seeking Men as Allies in UUWF's Work

by Rev. Marti Keller
Vice President/Communications

In our effort to spread the word about the good works of the UUWF, to find new partners, donors, and volunteers, the board has tended to focus on outreach to women. We have brainstormed ways to get information on our grants programs, our advocacy efforts, and our need for financial support to women's groups in UU congregations and to women in ministry, among others – which we will continue to do as we work toward our mission of advancing justice for women through education and advocacy.

But what about men as allies in this work? In a meeting last summer with funding representatives from the UU Veatch Program at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, New York, Executive Director Ned Wright urged us to more intentionally include men as we grow our programs.

“The benefits of women's economic and social empowerment are amply documented in studies and reports from around the world, Wright observes. “By affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person (our first UU principle) UU men and women commit

themselves to vigorous advocacy on behalf of greater women's empowerment.”

To walk our talk, Wright says, men as well as women must support efforts to tackle issues of gender-based social injustice, expand leadership development among women, and build political support for public policies that increase opportunities for women.

UUWF has already been gifted with generous and supportive men. Ed Simmons, who became a Unitarian Universalist in 1969, is a former chair of the Veatch program, former president of the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, and past member of the UUA Board of Trustees. Through his association with Unitarian Universalism and his own life experiences, he has long recognized the need to help change “typical attitudes about women,” to raise the bar in terms of lifting societal limitations on the aspirations of women within our liberal religious communities, this country and around the world.

He sees in the UUWF the potential to make real differences; he appreciates our work with young women, “giving them the message that you can be whatever you want.”

Simmons cites the women in his own life for stirring his passion around issues of equity and justice for women and girl. He says he has been blessed with sisters who devoted much of their time to his advancement, one of them delaying her own marriage in order to see him graduate from Harvard – and two bright and accomplished daughters.

His support for women was also highly influenced by the life of his mother, whose life was shaped by a time “when women had limited options, when women's place, they were told, was in the home.” She taught him that if he wanted doors opened beyond what he was born into, he could do it, but only with some sacrifice. For himself, he has always hoped that in terms of his vocation, if he was qualified, he would be hired. He wants to see the time when that is universally true for women.

When will he know his commitment to women and girls has been successful? “When women are free to do anything a white man can do.”

He sees the UUWF as an organization dedicated to reaching this goal, to secure the rights that will lead to the fully equal status of women in the U.S. and around the world.

Have You Included UUWF in Your Planned Giving?

by Mary-Ella Holst
New York, NY

Please consider joining other UUWF members to ensure the future of our UUWF through a planned gift. I made mine through a UUA Charitable Gift Annuity that guarantees me a fixed annual income payment at 6.9% throughout my lifetime, as well as enabling me to claim a one-time charitable deduction on my income taxes.

In the March/April issue of the Communicator, you read about how Phyllis Fairman, Bloomington, MN, also made a gift through a charitable annuity. Hers will provide a fixed annual income for an adult child.

Each of us make a decision to plan for the future of UUWF for different reasons and in different ways. Phyllis, for example, has been a strong supporter of UUWF for many years. But it was her experience at the 2004 Women's March in Washington D.C. that moved her to include UUWF in her planned giving.

She was “so impressed” by the organizing work of the UUWF's Clara Barton Legislative Assistant/Intern that she determined that she wanted to assure continuation of UUWF's impact on women's issues “not only within the denomination, but also on the larger community of women.”

I made my gift to honor our long history together and the continuing progress on issues such as the vote, women's right to choose, equal employment and education opportunities. And I know that, inevitably, there will be more issues ahead. I want to assure that UUWF will be there for the women in the pews with the resources that will guide, challenge and change. Others have made bequests to UUWF in their will.

Charitable annuities are made through the umbrella services of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Legacy Gifts Office, that is prepared to assist you (and your financial adviser) with all the necessary details, such

as current rates of return as well as other materials and forms to make such a gift. You can contact them directly: by phone at 888-792-5885 or by email at giftplans@uua.org.

The Legacy Gifts Office also has an online gift calculator and interactive gift planning presentation available at www.uua.org/giftplanning.

Creating a bequest is as easy as adding a sentence or two to your will. Regardless of the amount, your bequest is a statement of faith and, if you demonstrate that you care enough about UUWF to support its future, others will follow your example.

Your membership and generosity supports UUWF today and has supported it for many years in the past. Please now consider making a gift to the future.

Mary-Ella Holst is a member of Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City and of UUWF's National Development Council.

www.uuwf.org



*Advancing justice for women
through education and advocacy*

Inside This Issue

A Faith-Based Case for
Comprehensive Sexuality
Education Page 1

What Are Women's Issues? Page 2

Join the UUSC in Protecting
Women & Girls in Darfur Page 3

Seeking Men as Allies
in UUWF's Work Page 5

Have You Included UUWF
in Your Planned Giving? Page 5

*For other late-breaking news,
visit us online at www.uuwf.org.*



UUWF in a Box – the portable kit designed to help create a UUWF presence at local and regional meetings – was debuted by President Linda Lu Burciaga at the New England Regional Meeting in October. If you are interested in using the kit at a congregational, regional, or district meeting, please contact Ellen Spencer, Executive Administrator, at espencher@uua.org or 617-948-4692.