

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST WOMEN'S HERITAGE  
**DEEP ROOTS AND HIDDEN HISTORY**

From WOMEN AND RELIGION—DEEP ROOTS AND HIDDEN HISTORY By Dorothy Emerson, with assistance from Sarah Barber-Braun, Dorothy Borousch, Joan Goodwin, David Johnson, Lucile S. Longview and Carolyn McDade for the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association June, 1997, Phoenix, Arizona, by Unitarian Universalist Heritage Society (UUWHS)

**Chalice Lighting/Opening Words:**

*The World's first Parliament of Religions could not have been called sooner and have gathered the religionists of all these lands together. We had to wait for the hour to strike, until the steamship, the railway and the telegraph had brought men together, leveled their walls of separation and made them acquainted with each other; until scholars had broken the way through the pathless wilderness of ignorance, superstition and falsehood, and compelled them to respect each other's honesty, devotion and intelligence. A hundred years ago the world was not ready for this parliament. Fifty years ago it could not have been convened, and had it been called but a single generation ago, one-half of the religious world could not have been directly represented.*

*We are still at the dawn of this new era. Its grand possibilities are all before us, and its heights are ours to reach. We are assembled in this great parliament to look for the first time in each other's faces, and to speak to each other our best and truest words. I can only add my heartfelt word of greeting to those you already heard.*

Universalist minister Augusta Chapin, greeting delegates to the world's first major international interfaith gathering, held in Chicago, 1893

**Check in:** How are things with you today?

**Topic/Activity:**

Grounded in the present, we find support in our historical roots. For example, at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly in 1977, an historic action was taken that would set in motion changes throughout our Unitarian Universalist Association. A business resolution called "Women and Religion" was adopted unanimously. The worship service, "Deep Roots and Hidden History" explores the threads of history for the preceding 130 that are interwoven in the resolution. It is in looking backwards in time that we find deep roots of a theme and treasures that might have otherwise been left unfound. In that search, we also become aware that events have their own specific time and place, and happen when the factors are right.

Consider the primary parts of the resolution,

"WHEREAS, a principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to "affirm, defend, and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships.....

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED That the 1977 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association calls upon all Unitarian Universalists to examine carefully their own religious beliefs and the extent to which these beliefs influence sex-role stereotypes within their

own families.” (The full text is given at the end of the session plan.)

What impact has the resolution made on Unitarian Universalism or upon you as a Unitarian Universalist?

What has been or is the impact of the resolution on ceremonies, traditions and spiritual practices?

How inclusive does it feel in a Unitarian Universalist community?

Is such a resolution still needed? What still needs to be done and what can you do?

**Check out/Likes and Wishes:** How was the session for you?

**Closing:**

*Our Unitarian and Universalist women of the last century. .have had one virtue in common. They have been pioneers....*

*These women who have literally made history were not outstanding persons who happened to be Unitarians or Universalists in their religion. Not at all. It was their dynamic religious liberalism which made them great....*

*The Unitarian and Universalist religion was. . . an ethical leaven, and the result was an era of “Feminine Foment.”*

*Ramona Sawyer Barth, “Unitarian Women of the 19th Century,” in the Journal of Liberal Religion, 1948; amended with author’s permission to include Universalists.*

**BACKGROUND:**

**1977 Business Resolution Women and Religion**

WHEREAS, a principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to "affirm, defend, and promote the supreme worth and dignity of every human personality, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships"; and

WHEREAS, great strides have been taken to affirm this principle within our denomination; and

WHEREAS, some models of human relationships arising from religious myths, historical materials, and other teachings still create and perpetuate attitudes that cause women everywhere to be overlooked and undervalued; and

WHEREAS, children, youth and adults internalize and act on these cultural models, thereby tending to limit their sense of self-worth and dignity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the 1977 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association calls upon all Unitarian Universalists to examine carefully their own religious beliefs and the extent to which these beliefs influence sex-role stereotypes within their own families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly urges the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association to encourage the Unitarian Universalist Association administrative officers and staff, the religious leaders within societies, the Unitarian Universalist theological schools, the directors of related organizations, and the planners of seminars and conferences, to make every effort to: (a) put traditional assumptions and language in perspective, and (b) avoid sexist assumptions and language in the future.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly urges the President of the Unitarian

Universalist Association to send copies of this resolution to other denominations examining sexism inherent in religious literature and institutions and to the International Association of Liberal Religious Women and the IARF; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly requests the Unitarian Universalist Association to: (a) join with those who are encouraging others in the society to examine the relationship between religious and cultural attitudes toward women, and (b) to send a representative and resource materials to associations appropriate to furthering the above goals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly requests the President of the UUA to report annually on progress in implementing this resolution.

Note: The UUWHS is now part of the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society, 2011.