

Small Group Ministry Session

Failure Is Impossible: The Impact of Women

Rev. Helen Zidowecki, For “Circles of Reflection Workshop,” General Assembly, June 21, 2012

Opening Words

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal... Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country.”

Imagine being with 300 people at the Seneca Falls, New York, Convention in 1848 for the development of the Declaration of Sentiments against the grievances regarding the status and rights of women in all areas of life, *primarily the right to vote!* May we engage the energy of the movement that lasted over 70 years as we work on Social Justice for women in our time.

Check-in: How you are today?

Topic: *Failure is Impossible: The Impact of Women*

We remember the large number of Unitarian and Universalist women who were involved in the struggle to gain the vote for women. In that remembering, we pause to reflect on how we, as Unitarian Universalist women live into the responsibility of that right. As we approach the 100th anniversary of having the right to vote, what do you see as the impact of women having the vote? What has been accomplished? How have women made a difference? What is our call to action?

1. What impressions did you receive as you were growing up about the role of women in the public sector, in business, in the church?
2. How have experiences of women changed, from the time of your grandmother and mother to yourself and daughters? What is the perception of women for the future?
3. Describe your role or influence as a women? Does being Unitarian Universalist factor into this description?

Check-out/Likes and Wishes: How was this session for you?

Closing Words by Elizabeth Padgham

When the first Suffrage parade was being planned in New York City I thought little of it as affecting the church. However, it dawned on me that the busy chatting would stop as I came into sight... Finally, a group of the women told me that I would disgrace the church if I marched in the Suffrage parade. The “disgrace” was said to be a quotation from one of the husbands...I told them I thought in time to come the church would be proud to know their minister was broad enough to walk in the first suffrage parade...I was thinking I would be asked to resign, but I wouldn’t back down even then. I did march, and the affair was never brought up again.

Theodore Stanton and Harriet Stanton Biatch, eds., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in her letters. Diary, and Reminiscences* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1922), 40, excerpt

Resource: UU Women’s Heritage Society GAWorship services “Failure is Impossible!” (1995) and “They Showed the Way” (1998). <http://www.uuwhs.org/worfailure.php>

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Failure Is Impossible: Perceptions and Assumptions

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Opening Words

Persistence. Courage. Determination.

The bitter cold winter of 1917, a world at war,

President Woodrow Wilson was outspoken opponent of women’s suffrage.

A new Woman’s Party, led by Alice Paul, took to the streets.

Hundreds of women marched and picketed the White House

Women were arrested, imprisoned, and mistreated.

Their action was very controversial, even within the ranks of suffragists.

One of the pickets was Olympia Brown, Universalist minister, then 82 years old.

The movement toward rights for women, specifically the right to vote, extended from the Seneca Convention in 1848 to the ratification of the nineteenth amendment to the United States constitution August 18, 1920. The goal may have been universal, their actions were not. How too, today, there are multiple paths to the vision of Social Justice for women. What is your path?

Check-in: How you are today?

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1. We frequently hear the term “the women’s vote” in polls and in discussing the strength of political leaders. Do you see yourself as a woman who has political power? Do you find that others perceive you the same way or differently from your perception? How?
2. The implication of “the women’s vote” is that women will vote a specific, and predictable, way. Does being a Unitarian Universalist woman make a difference on how you make decisions on issues or actions? How?
3. Does the filter of being a woman overlap with other filters – such as race and ethnicity, class, culture? How?

Check-out/Likes and Wishes: How was this session for you?

Closing Words

Olympia Brown was one of the very few women of that first generation of suffragists who lived to see the final ratification of the woman suffrage amendment on August 26, 1920. A few days later, she told her congregation at the Universalist Church in Racine, Wisconsin, “It is worth a lifetime to behold the victory.”

Theodore Atanton and Harriet Stanton Biatch, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, NY: Harper & Bros, 1922, p.50

Resource: UU Women’s Heritage Society GAWorship services “Failure is Impossible!” (1995) and “They Showed the Way” (1998). <http://www.uuwhs.org/worfailure.php>

Small Group Ministry Session

Failure Is Impossible: Involvement

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Opening words

“The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? I scarcely believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens, and no State has a right to make any new law, or to enforce any old law, which shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several States is today null and void, precisely as is every one against negroes.

We no longer petition legislature or Congress to give us the right to vote, but appeal to women everywhere to exercise their too long neglected “citizen’s right.” ... It is on this line that we propose to fight our battle for the ballot — peaceably but nevertheless persistently — until we achieve complete triumph and all United States citizens, men and women alike, are recognized as equals in the government”.

So spoke Susan B. Anthony in defense of her right as a citizen. She had been so bold as to go to the polls in Rochester, New York, to vote in 1872. Miss Anthony was arrested, taken to the city jail, and charged with a fine which she refused to pay. Involvement with risk!

Check-in: How you are today?

Topic: *Failure Is Impossible: Involvement*

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1. Share your involvement in voting, in working for a specific issue, running for office, or other such action. What inspired you to be involved? What role does your being a woman play in the level of your activity? How has/does being involved feel? What impact does your involvement have?
2. What issues need your attention now? What is the women’s perspective on the issue?
3. What barriers have you experienced or witnessed to being involved as a woman? Are all women able to vote or involved in other ways? What support is needed to overcome these barriers (including support systems for involvement, such as child care, transportation)?

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

Closing Words

Although Susan B. Anthony did not live to behold the victory, she kept the faith to the end. Her last words were “Failure is impossible!” She was right. And now it is up to us to continue the influence of women toward justice in all areas of our lives.

Resource: UU Women’s Heritage Society GAWorship services “Failure is Impossible!” (1995) and “They Showed the Way” (1998). <http://www.uuwhs.org/worfailure.php>