

***What Is Reproductive Justice?***

“Circles of Reflection Workshop,” General Assembly, June 21, 2012

Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation & Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

**Opening Words:** “To Be Of Use” Marge Piercy, *Singing the Living Tradition* #567

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who stand in the line and haul in their places,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put  
out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

**Check-in:** How are you today?

**Focus/Topic:** *What Is Reproductive Justice?*

As members of a religious tradition with a long and substantive history working for reproductive rights and a firm commitment to anti-racism, multiculturalism, and social justice, Unitarian Universalists are called to widen the current socio-political debate on “reproductive rights” to one on “reproductive justice.”

Within the framework of reproductive justice, the Unitarian Universalist Association works against the cultural, political, economic, and structural constraints that limit women's access to health care and full reproductive choice. Reproductive justice, a concept put forth by coalitions of women of color, promotes the right of all women to have children, not to have children, and to raise their children in safe and healthy environments. It does not isolate or pit important social issues against each other, rather it works to promote these rights across many areas, including comprehensive sex education, economic justice, ending violence against women, LGBT equality, and racial justice.

1. Why, as a faith community, do Unitarian Universalists work to promote reproductive rights and reproductive justice?
2. How has your life been impacted by the movements of reproductive rights and reproductive justice?
3. For many successful and productive years, Unitarian Universalists worked for reproductive rights. Since the mid-1990s, however, the framework of reproductive justice has been useful, particularly by groups of women of color, to frame a larger movement against reproductive oppression. How has your reproductive life been impacted by, or might yet be impacted by, your race, sexuality orientation, gender identity, and/or socio-economic background?

**Check-Out/Likes & Wishes:** How was the session for you?

**Closing Words:**

Earth mother, star mother,  
You who are called by  
a thousand names,  
May all remember  
we are cells in your body  
and dance together.  
You are the grain and the loaf  
that sustains us each day,  
And as you are patient  
with our struggles to learn  
So shall we be patient  
with ourselves and each other.  
We are radiant light  
and sacred dark – the balance –  
You are the embrace that heartens  
And the freedom beyond fear.  
Within you we are born,  
we grow, live, and die –  
You bring us around the circle to rebirth  
Within us you dance  
Forever.

- Starhawk, *Singing the Living Tradition* #524

***Reproductive Justice: Choice and Loss***

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**Opening Words:**

Conscience is the name given the governing principles of life to which a person is ultimately committed. The totality of the self and thus the integrity of personhood is involved in the moral dictates of conscience. This is the primary arena of the spirit’s struggle with the moral claims made by the will of God. The depths of one’s own being and the ground of meaning of one’s own existence are expressed in the struggles of conscience.

- Paul D. Simmons; *Personhood, the Bible, and the Abortion Debate*

**Check-in:** How are you today?

**Focus/Topic:** *Reproductive Justice: Choice and Loss*

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1. Unitarian Universalists affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Please share experiences you have had in which your autonomy over your reproductive and sexual life (or lack thereof) impacted your sense of your own ‘inherent worth and dignity’?
2. Tell us about an important moment in your reproductive life. What made it important, and how does that moment relate to your faith and the rest of your life?
3. The bodily autonomy of pregnant (and potentially pregnant) people is being threatened in legislatures across the United States and in Washington D.C. What role do faith communities have in the current debates?

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

**Closing Words:** “The Larger Circle” by Wendell Berry, *Singing the Living Tradition*, #646

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,	And the larger circle of all creatures
And the hands of those who come after us.	Passing in and out of life
We enter the little circle of each other’s arms	Who move also in a dance
And the larger circle of lovers,	To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it
Whose hands are joined in a dance.	Except in fragments.

***Reproductive Justice: Raising Children***

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**Opening Words:** “That Passeth All Understanding” by Denise Levertov, *Oblique Prayer*

An awe so quiet

I don't know when it began.

A gratitude

had begun

to sing in me.

Was there

some moment

dividing

song from no song?

When does dewfall begin?

When does night

fold its arms over our hearts

to cherish them?

When is daybreak?

**Check-in:** How are you today?

**Focus/Topic:** *Reproductive Justice: Raising Children*

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1. From your experience, describe the social, political, economic, and spiritual conditions in which you raised/would like to raise/believe are important to raising healthy children.
2. How does/can the religious community and government create and sustain those healthy conditions?

3. How can we support a woman when the desired conditions are not in place? How can we support her sense of worth and dignity when things are less than ideal?

**Check-Out/Likes & Wishes:** How was the session for you?

**Closing Words: By** Elizabeth M. Strong

Seek for the spirit of life that is within you;  
that you might know more fully its power and strength.  
Seek for the spirit of life that surrounds you;  
that you might know more fully its connection to you.  
Seek for the spirit of life that is within others;  
that you might enter more fully into the community  
that embraces us, this day and every day.