



Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

News – June 2021

To Do Things Differently



When I was trying to quit smoking, I used all the tricks in the book: Delay your first cigarette; drop one "usual" cigarette a week and slowly reduce the number of cigarettes a day; stay quit for 21 days in a row and your new habits will cement themselves. All of those were great tips, but the biggest game-changer for me wasn't a habit of smoking, it was a habit of *thought*: I had to stop thinking of myself as a smoker, and start thinking of myself as a *nonsmoker*. When I started thinking about myself in this way, I was able to quit and stay quit for the last 25 years. These habits—our *habits of thought*—are often the hardest ones to break.

This is true in our work, too. It seems simple, but it's actually pretty challenging: **to do things differently, we have to think differently.**

We've all had a crash course in doing things differently in 2020—masking, social distancing, curbside pickup, working from home, distance learning... What seems almost normal

Ann Wiesner is the UUWF's interim executive director.

now wasn't thinkable a year ago, and what seems unthinkable now was perfectly normal a year ago.

What makes new behavior stick is about *how we think* just as much as it is about how we behave. (The issue of masking this past year is Exhibit A. If you think it's your responsibility to keep others safe and believe science, you will likely wear a mask; if you think the pandemic is a hoax, you're not likely to mask up.) It's true in families, communities, workplaces, and places of worship. When you want to re-imagine the work, change the organizational culture, or rethink how you made decisions so that more people can meaningfully weigh in, those visions are grounded in **how we think**. The behavior comes after. In fact, many organizations stop at the thinking part of change, and don't make it to the behavior, or vice versa: they dream but never bring it to life, or they ask for changes in behavior without grounding it in the way people think about the work.

Change is difficult and uncomfortable, time-consuming and energy-sucking. When things get busy, or difficult, it is natural to revert to what's most comfortable. Rather than seeing this as a problem, we can use it as a way to check ourselves and learn. If an organization can adopt a learning mentality in these moments (rather than a blaming or shaming one), it can even be fun and exciting.

UUWF is in a period of re-invention—we've identified things we've been missing and we're creating new ways of thinking and doing. We are exploring how to build relationships amongst and between UU women that help us all be better allies and co-conspirators in the movement for collective liberation. We're looking forward to trying things like learning circles, leadership communities, and ways for different voices to speak up and be heard. We hope you're as excited as we are about this direction. [Drop us a line](#) and let us know your thoughts!

A New Model of Inclusion

The UUWF has taken several steps to move into a period of expansive growth in 2021 and beyond. Most notably, we have chosen to **move beyond being a membership-by-fee organization**. We welcome all women and femme-identifying people interested in joining our work and consider them our peers and partners. We view this as an expression of our commitment to equitable governance practices and a rejection of the notion that people must “pay to play.”

We are so grateful for the financial support we’ve received from those of you who have been members to-date. You remain our beloved supporters and we hope you will continue to keep us in mind when making financial donations as well as help us welcome and expand our circle to many new supporters as we grow.

We are also in the process of expanding and diversifying the makeup of our Board of Directors. And, we have begun testing ideas for programming that helps UU women to connect and grow as activists and allies. We are exploring models for rolling out this programming in the coming 12-18 months. Watch for more news as we build covenantal relationships among Unitarian Universalist women that equip us all to be better co-conspirators and allies in the movement for collective liberation.

UU Women's Breakfast
Wednesday, June 23rd
10-11:45 a.m. Central

Bring Your Food.
Stay for the Nourishment.

GA registration not required
All are welcome



This year's annual UU Women's Breakfast will include:

- **Rev. Dr. Qiyamah A. Rahman** discusses her research on the voices and stories of Black Unitarian Universalist women.
- Interviews with members of the **Clara Barton Sisterhood**, women aged 80 and over who have been honored for their contributions to their congregations and communities.
- Delicious **table topics and small group discussion**.
- And much more!

There is no cost, but you must register to receive the Zoom participation link.

A recording will be made available afterwards for those who are unable to attend in real time.

Register Now



Spiritual Grounding

By Rev. Isabel Call (she/her/hers)
Unitarian Universalist Minister, MDiv
UUWF Board Member

It is a strange time to be alive. I don't have kids myself, but they are constantly on my mind. I try (and fail) to imagine how I would be different today if, during high school, I'd been spared a year of in-person adolescence. My heart reaches to trust these new leaders. They are being shaped by forces beyond our control, but they are finding their agency and power to lead us well.

More and more of the young people in my life who I understood to be girls are coming out as non-binary. It is an expression not just of their truth, but also of their leadership. If I

want to understand and to follow, I have to reconsider what it means to be a woman. In her book *Untamed*, Glennon Doyle writes:

"There is no such thing as a feminine quality... 'Femininity' is just a set of human characteristics a culture pours into a bucket and slaps with the label 'feminine'...

"Human qualities are not gendered. What *is* gendered is permission to express certain traits. Why? Why would our culture prescribe... strict gender roles? And why would it be important for our culture to label all tenderness and mercy as *feminine*? Because disallowing the expression of these qualities is the way the status quo keeps its power... mercy, humanity, and vulnerability cannot be tolerated...

"So how does power squash the expression of these traits? In a misogynistic culture, all that is needed is to label them feminine. Then we can forever discount them in women and forever shame them out of men. Ta-da: no more messy, world-changing tenderness to deal with. We can continue on without our shared humanity challenging the status quo."

Does that include me? In addition to being discounted and squashed as a woman, am I also complicit in this violence? Doyle writes of power and of culture. How am I an agent of this power and a defender of this culture?

As a woman, displaying my femininity strategically has given me access to physical safety and material security. As a white woman, I've been advantaged in tapping into stolen wealth controlled primarily by white men and the institutions they've built. When I cling to this privilege for fear of destitution, I'm expressing racism, not femininity. When I face my fear and risk the anger of misogyny, I tap into mercy, tenderness, and vulnerability. I begin to heal. This doesn't make me a better woman. I'm becoming human.

The UUWF board recently read Audre Lorde's, *The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism*. In it, she writes:

"For women raised to fear, too often anger threatens annihilation. In the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. The anger of others was to be avoided at all costs because there was nothing to be learned from it but pain, a judgment that we had been bad girls, come up lacking, not done what we were supposed to do. And if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us.

"But the strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative, and in standing to those distortions which we inherited without blame, but which are now ours to

alter. The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth."

It makes sense to me that many of our new leaders are opting out of the gender binary. They refuse to accept their powerlessness in relation to patriarchy. Shedding the privileges entombed in gender pronouns is a deliberate, ongoing renunciation of violence. This fierce commitment to change is a gift to all of humanity. As a white person, it shows me that it's possible to survive the anger of my oppressors. It makes me curious about what deliberate ongoing commitment I can make to renounce white supremacy.

My ability to understand and respect nonbinary people is nurtured by my accountable relationships with women on the UUWF board. I continue to identify as a woman largely because I love having women as my peers. Seeing these particular women several times a month throughout the past two-plus years of my life has been my anchor. The work we're doing feeds my hope. I pray that you, too, have a group of such peers. And if you're looking for one, stay in touch. We're reaching for you.

Clara Barton Sisterhood Welcomes New Members



The Clara Barton Sisterhood welcomes our newest inductees (pictured from left), who were all nominated by the Women's Alliance of First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Arlington, MA: **Natalie Tyler, Gwen Hooper, and Debby Lewis.**

The Clara Barton Sisterhood was created in 1979 as a way for local women's groups, congregations, and individuals to honor women aged 80 and over for their contributions to their congregations and communities. [Learn more here.](#)

Donate to UUWF

Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

advancing justice for women and girls and promoting their spiritual growth

www.uuwf.org

Contact us: uuwf@uuwf.org



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