

**A FAITH PERSPECTIVE ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:
Remarks for Rally in Support of Whole Women's Health Clinic
Las Cruces, NM
October 4, 2014**

I've been invited to join you this afternoon to offer a faith perspective on reproductive health. What I bring is a perspective from my own faith community, Unitarian Universalism.

From the start, I should say that this is *a* faith perspective, not necessarily *the* faith perspective of my community. Unitarian Universalists recognize that people of faith can disagree in *good faith* on many issues. And if you have a room with 25 UUs, you're likely to find *at least* 26 opinions!

Nevertheless, we've been pretty consistent about some things over the years. Our faith affirms (among other things) the inherent worth and dignity of every person, the authority of individual conscience in decision-making, and respect for human life. And since 1963, 10 years before *Roe vs. Wade*, our denominational association has supported the rights of women, and their freedom to make faithful choices about their bodies and their families.

Not all women will make the same decisions. But we believe that reproductive decisions are so personal and private, that the power should belong to the person affected most - the woman herself. Not the government, not the woman's husband or boyfriend or parents, and certainly not hectoring protesters - but the woman herself, in consultation with her own conscience and faith perspective, and when possible with people she trusts and whom she knows genuinely care about her and her well-being.

Such decisions by women are rarely made in isolation. Long ago, when I was in divinity school, education professor Carol Gilligan studied women's ethical decision-making process, specifically in situations where they had to decide whether or not to have an abortion. Her book, *In a Different Voice*, is well known. Gilligan discovered that most of the time, women make such decisions in light of their relationships with people they loved - for example, the well-being of the children they were already caring for. The decisions came, not lightly, but with a deep respect for human life.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Unitarian Universalists tended to frame questions about abortion solely in terms of individual rights and free choice. That still stands. But in recent decades, we've also been seeing things more relationally, and in a broader context. The UUA website (www.uua.org) contains a Public Policy Statement on reproductive health, based on resolutions passed over the years. It focuses on reproductive choice including access to abortion - but also on the necessity of family planning, effective contraception, and age-appropriate sex education.

With regard to that last category, the UUA has collaborated with the United Church of Christ on the "Our Whole Lives" curriculum, intended for people of all ages, but used

especially with middle- and high school students. Our Whole Lives (OWL) not only provides accurate information, but also educates young women *and men* on the importance of making caring and responsible choices. Studies show that education like this has *already* reduced the incidence of unwanted pregnancies in this country - and thus has also reduced the frequency of abortion.

Very recently, our faith community has been called to go even deeper in looking at the issues - going from “reproductive choice” to “reproductive *justice*.” One of our Congregational Study/Action issues is entitled “Reproductive Justice: Expanding Our Social Justice Calling.” It asks us to regard “the right to have children, to not have children, and to parent children in safe and healthy environments” as a human right.

A curriculum has been published in connection with this Study/Action issue. The curriculum invites us to “a broader analysis of racial, economic, cultural, and structural constraints on women’s power,” and to consider how “eliminating racism, classism, and sexism [can] reduce the need for abortion and enable families to care for the children they *do* have.”

This is the religious context in which my faith community welcomes Whole Women’s Health to Las Cruces, as an important addition to other health services provided. And as several church members have said, “This is *not* just about abortion.”

We welcome a facility:

- *that will provide many women's health services at affordable rates, and
- *that is teen- and LGBTQ-friendly, and
- *that respects the needs of its patients for safety and privacy in making all family planning and reproductive decisions,
- *and that is staffed by well-trained, competent, and compassionate personnel.

This is only one part of a larger vision - for a society in which *every* family is cherished and protected, and in which every child comes into the world, wanted, welcomed, and loved.