

Justice for Women Working Group



Mission/Vision Statement: “From the moment of its inception, the NCC office and working group on Justice for Women tackled the hard, concrete issues impacting women’s lives. That work has continued in a variety of prophetic, celebratory and educational forms through years of backlash against women in church and society. Its continuing work and witness are vital for our present and future.”

-- Rev. Dr. Joan Martin, Episcopal Divinity School and founding director, Justice for Women (in a 1993 interview)

The Justice for Women Working Group is an ecumenical partnership that affirms the faithful witness of women. JWWG serves an important role in the context of the churches that mirror society’s continued ambivalence toward women who seek equality and justice. Through ecumenical collaboration, women in the churches are able to creatively develop programs and resources for leadership for economic and social justice in the churches and the larger society while making a contribution to the whole ecumenical movement.

Program Summary 2004: The Justice for Women Working Group (JWWG) of the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) has been part of the program life of the NCC since 1977. It is now part of the Justice and Advocacy Commission, one of the NCC’s five program commissions. The purpose of the group is to lead member communions as they struggle on behalf of justice for women in church and society, offering resources, education, and advocacy. The group is composed of representatives from NCC member communions and other related groups who

share a commitment to justice and ecumenical work. JWWG leadership is managed by its Program Director, as well as by co-chairs who facilitate meetings and monitor projects and programs. Leadership is shared so that it reflects the racial and ethnic diversity the group actively seeks to uphold in its membership.

In defining their work, members are keen to choose endeavors that are realistic in terms of implementation across their diverse range of denominations, and that



do not duplicate existing efforts – denominational, ecumenical or otherwise. Projects and programs tend to be creative, both because of members’ approaches and

limited resources. Program Director Karen Hessel noted that, “the women agree to work together on certain things that they know they can do together that they don’t necessarily have the freedom, or flexibility, or the resources to do in their own context.”

From open letters (such as ones in 2003 regarding the dangers of the pending war in Iraq) addressed to religious and political leaders, to co-sponsoring an ecumenical and interfaith consultation on women in peace processes, to the recent publication of several study and worship resources, JWWG members advocate to eradicate the injustice that disproportionately affects women and children’s lives in church and society: poverty, violence, sexism, racism, health, etc.

Equally important, JWWG members offer each other an environment of safety and mutual support. Denominations often times undergo similar trends along the same timeline, such as budget cuts in women’s programs and advocacy commissions, and challenges posed to women’s leadership. It is important to have a table where positive and not so

positive trends can be evaluated in a strategic context. JWWG brings talented women with creative use of limited resources to work as ecumenical colleagues.



JWWG is currently focusing on a range of national initiatives including the poverty mobilization through the “Let Justice Roll” campaign; inclusive, bias-free language; Tirzah, and follow up on the fall 2003 Hartford Seminary Consultation: The

Status of Women’s Organizing in Ecumenical Churches Since the 1970s. A groundbreaking consultation on Women and Peace Processes was held in March 2004 during the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This has led to commitments to bring more denominational women to the UN CSW in 2005 with important opportunities for further leadership development of women in our churches in this global arena.

2004-05 Initiatives

Women and Children Living in Poverty: Because the need is still so urgent, our priority initiative that began in 1999 to confront issues of women and children living in poverty continues in education and advocacy, working with and through the NCC Poverty Mobilization and the LET JUSTICE ROLL initiatives. JW staff serves as an integral part of the staff team working on the NCC poverty initiatives.

Education and Advocacy with and through women’s networks includes work on Public Policy issues affecting low-income women and their families, with focus on TANF (welfare reform) and related issues.

Women participate in JW networks in LET JUSTICE ROLL events in communities across the nation. JW participates in the on-going work of the NCC Poverty Mobilization Coordinating Committee. Its members contribute staff time and creative energy directed towards accomplishing the goals of the Poverty Mobilization.

Another important contribution is publication, distribution and leadership training using resources developed by JWWG:

“For the Good of All Families, Affirming Our Interdependence,” a resource designed for use in a variety of settings, congregations or ecumenical groups for addressing economic and social concerns in a gender perspective. There are articles for individual readers and

interactive exercises for small group use. It provides a careful look at how we can participate in weaving the social fabric to help ensure the stability, security and equity of all families. Get it at:

www.nccusa.org/pdfs/goodofallfamilies.pdf

“Staying on Course: Navigating the Shifting Tides of Government and Church Partnerships.” This JWWG resource provides a better understanding of the nature of “Charitable Choice” and the funding of faith-based initiatives. Get it at:

www.nccusa.org/publicwitness/stayingoncourseintro.html



Tirzah: Tirzah is the name chosen by an emerging ecumenical justice oriented young adult women’s network sponsored by JWWG. They are in the midst of website development, and are launching program initiatives, resource development and leadership development, which all include ecumenical formation opportunities. Tirzah presented a workshop at “Come to the Feast” the NCC-sponsored Young Adult Ministry gathering in 2004 in Tampa. Tirzah members participate in LET JUSTICE ROLL and are emerging as a source of leadership and talent in the ecumenical community.

Bias-free Language Initiative: Based on “words that hurt and words that heal,” the JWWG will develop resources to assist with leadership development in the use of inclusive, bias-free language in our churches. JWWG is considering the development of a DVD as a practical resource as a result of this work. Presbyterian Women and the UMC Women’s Division are taking the leadership on this work, choosing to do it together rather than separately.

Women’s Leadership in the Churches: Regional Mini-Consultations: JWWG plans to hold mini-consultations on issues and strategies of women’s leadership in the churches. This is based on initial research done in collaboration with Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research and the Consultation on Women’s Leadership held at Hartford Seminary in September 2003 and funded with grants, primarily from The Sister Fund and the ELCA Commission for Women. Additional grants for further research and analysis are anticipated in the context of these consultations.

Resources for nurturing women’s spirituality in a justice perspective: Publications developed by Justice for Women: *Women at the Well, Meditations on Healing and Wholeness* Vol. 1; *Women at the Well*

Meditations for Quenching Our Thirst, Vol. 2, and “Sing Out New Visions, Prayers, Poems and Reflections by Women.” Available from Friendship Press: Call toll-free to request catalog and/or to order: 1-800-889-5733.

Women and Globalization: JW helped found what has become AFRUS (The Africa/US Women’s Partnership). It is a unique, broad-based coalition of women’s networks and faith based organizations in Africa and in the U.S. committed to working together to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic. A resource being welcomed in our churches through its women’s organizations and designed for flexible use in adult education is now available. It is: “Coming to Say Goodbye, Stories of AIDS in Africa,” a resource for education and advocacy in a DVD format. This documentary film was produced by Maryknoll Productions. Internet links with partners are included and a study guide is available online. United Church of Christ Resources is acting as distributor: 1-800-537-3394 (\$10/copy, reduced prices for quantities of 100 or more)

Through Church Center UN Offices and **Ecumenical Women 2000Plus**, JW connects with an ecumenical presence at UN NGO events where, in recent years, religious fundamentalism has become an active and disruptive force. Plans are underway for international actions at the UN, especially during the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005. In 2004 JWWG co-facilitated a consultation on women’s participation and leadership in peacemaking. Denominations are bringing women to New York for the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005 where collaboration with Church World Service will focus on **water as a women's issue**. Action during the UN CSW will include a solidarity walk for clean, accessible water, and highlight the distance that women must walk every day to retrieve water. www.ew2000plus.org

WCC Decade to Overcome Violence: JW has been integral to the US DOV efforts in 2004, which will continue into 2005 and beyond. It is no coincidence that JW members are the majority of the women on the DOV US Committee leadership team.

Advocacy Days: Justice for Women is involved in planning for advocacy days, March 11-14, 2005, in Washington, D.C. JWWG members will be involved in leading workshops and recruiting participants from their large and active networks of advocates.

WCC Sponsored North American Consultation: “Women’s Voices and Visions: New Ways of Being Church” Stony Point, N.Y., November 4-7, 2004. JW participates in building on the work of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Justice For Women Working Group Members

Jennifer Butler	Presbyterian UN Office
Garlinda Burton	General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, UMC
Joanne Chadwick	ELCA Commission for Women
Thelma Chambers-Young	Past-President, Women’s Dept., PNBC
Marge Christie	Episcopal Church
J. Ann Craig	General Board of Global Missions, UMC
Carol Q. Cosby	Christian Church (Disciples)
Lois Dauway	Women’s Division, UMC
Laura Everett	Tirzah, Co-chair
Martha Gardner	Peace & Justice Consultant, Episcopal Church
Tee Garlington	International Evangelical Churches
Brenda Girton-Mitchell	NCC Washington Office
Sandra Hasenauer	ABW Ministries, American Baptist Churches
Virginia Holmstrom	ABC-Women
Ann Crews Melton	PCUSA/Women’s Advocacy
Jean Martensen	WCC-DOV, US Committee
Tonya McClary	AFSC
Lillian Oats	Vice-Moderator for Justice & Peace, Presbyterian Women
Loey Powell	UCC Human Rights, Justice for Women & Transformation
June Ramage Rogers	Ghana Project & PW Global Exchange
Joanne Reich	Community & Institutional Ministries Unit, UMC GBGM
Margaret Rose	Women’s Ministries, Episcopal Church
Kim Robey	Women’s Ministries, Episcopal Church
Mary Elva Smith	Women’s Ministries, PCUSA
Sandy Sorensen	Public Life & Social Policy, UCC
Doris Strieter	Women of the ELCA
Rajyashri S. Waghray	Education & Advocacy for International Justice & Human Rights Church World Service
Charlotte Williams	ELCA Commission for Women

Justice for Women Working Group currently relates to these organizations:

- The Sister Fund
- National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
- World Day of Prayer International Committee
- Ecumenical Women 2000Plus
- Faith Trust Institute

Justice for Women is part of the NCC, Justice and Advocacy Commission.