

THE ALLIANCE ALERT November-December 2021

The Women's Alliance of the Unitarian Church of All Souls, Inc.





MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Christine Goodwin

Holiday season is almost upon us, and we hope this year will be more normal, with family and friends sharing a truly thankful Thanksgiving and celebrating a joyful Hanukkah and Christmas.

The Women's Alliance has many ongoing projects as we approach the end of the year. At the November monthly meeting we will have the election of new officers. Our Finance Committee will start work on a budget for the upcoming year. The Finance Committee also develops and recommends a list of charitable organizations that will receive year-end donations from the Women's Alliance upon approval by the Executive Board.

Another end-of-year activity is the nomination of women for the Clara Barton Sisterhood Award and undergoing its application process. The Clara Barton Sisterhood is administered by the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation and is bestowed upon members at the beginning of the new year by one of our ministers. The award is named for Universalist Clara Barton, who founded the American Red Cross and remained active until well into her 80s. In order to honor her example, women who are 80 or older and who are active members of their UU church are honored and awarded a Clara Barton Sisterhood certificate. While we are blessed with many talented and active members, we don't necessarily know members' ages. If you know of someone who would qualify and would like to nominate someone, including yourself, for this award, please email or call me so we may begin the application process.

Recent Clara Barton Sisterhood members have been:

2021 — Mary Ann Van Osdol

2020 — Mary Geissman, Mary Dugan

2019 — Sandra Ekberg, Marilyn Mehr

2018 — Maureen Marwick, Peggy Montgomery

A new chapter:

WA member Cynthia Brown has been the Finance and HR Manager here at All Souls for the past five years. She will be resigning as of Friday November 12, 2021 in order to pursue another opportunity as well as study for her MBA at Syracuse University in an online program. Happily, Cynthia will continue as a member of the Women's Alliance and we wish her well and hope to see her at some of our upcoming WA events.

Finally, I wish you all a most happy Holiday season and a blessed New Year!

WOMEN'S ALLIANCE UPCOMING EVENTS

NOTE ON EVENT PARTICIPATION: The Executive Board encourages all members to participate in Women's Alliance activities. However, as some outings require the use of staircases, walking long distances or crossing uneven terrains, any member with physical limitations should use good judgment before registering. The Board asks that such members speak with the outing leader and consult the visit site to determine how able they will be to get around; further, it is strongly recommended that they bring a companion to help them. Because outing leaders are responsible to a group of attendees, they cannot assist an individual on an outing, unless, of course, an emergency arises. By participating in WA outings, attendees agree they have read this statement and will follow its recommendations.

Please note that all venues of in-person events below require visitors to wear appropriate face coverings. All but one require proof of vaccination against COVID along with a government-issued photo ID, while the Broadway Presbyterian Church (November 15th) "encourages everyone to become vaccinated."

Wednesday, November 3, 2-4 p.m.

Bridge Special Interest Group (SIG) Preliminary Meeting

All bridge players are welcome, even those with rusty skills! Judith Kozloff (judithuk@mindspring.com) is organizing the return of this popular SIG for those with some experience playing bridge. We hope to coordinate schedules for the twice monthly meetings in the future. Forrest Church Gallery.

Saturday, November 6, 4 p.m. Music Special Interest Group (SIG)

The Dessoff Choirs, The Dessoff Orchestra and guest soloists will present the New York premiere of Craig Hella Johnson's Considering Matthew Shepard, which the Washington Post calls "powerfully cathartic." The 2016 oratorio about the brutal murder of the young gay man who has become a symbol for hope and empowerment weaves together the musical styles of country and western, gospel, and chant with lyrics taken from Shepard's personal journal, news reports and more. New York Society for Ethical Culture Concert Hall, 2 W. 64th St., \$11. Contact Mary Geissman, 646-238-7280 or migeissman@gmail.com for tickets.

Thursday, November 11, 11 a.m. (Note change of date!)

Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror

Labyrinth of Forms: Women and Abstraction, 1930-1950

The most comprehensive retrospective ever devoted to Jasper Johns's art features some of his most iconic works along with many others shown for the first time. Labyrinth of Forms highlights the achievements of important American women abstractionists, some who have been overlooked and others, such as Lee Krasner and Louise Nevelson, who have been duly recognized. Whitney Museum of Art, 99 Gansevoort St. Advance tickets required: \$25, \$18 Seniors, at whitney.org/visit. Optional lunch at 1 p.m. at the Whitney, and a walk on the High Line for those interested. RSVP to Sandra Fisher at sfisher535@aol.com, 646-675-3608. Please include your email and cell.



Monday, November 15, 3-4:30 p.m., on Zoom Abortion Access in Texas: What's Next?



Membership Meeting presenters: The Rev. Dr. Daniel C. Kanter, Senior Minister of First Unitarian Church of Dallas; Chair of The Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas Clergy Advisory Board; Past Chair of Clergy Advocacy Board for Planned Parenthood Federation of America; and Molly Duane, JD/MPH, Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Reproductive Rights.

Con't . . .

The Rev. Kanter will take us back in history, talking about how evangelical leaders used abortion as a political wedge and got us to this moment. He will then talk about how clergy are trying to organize in response to the short- and long-term issues with regards to reproductive freedom. Ms. Duane will give us a legal briefing on where things are at that this point. It will be weeks before the United States Supreme Court addresses the Mississippi case that could allow states to outlaw abortion altogether.



Thursday, November 18, 7:30-9 p.m. Music Special Interest Group (SIG)

Music for Food presents live chamber music from Fauré, Still, and Beethoven. Broadway Presbyterian Church, 601 W. 114th St. at Broadway. Admission is by donation for the Broadway Community food pantry and soup kitchen.

Thursday, December 2, 11 a.m. The Morgan Library & Museum



Exhibitions are an historical and intellectual stretch: *Drawings by Black Artists from the American South; Women Artists and Patrons in the Natural Sciences, 1650–1800;* J. Pierpont Morgan's Library; *Imperial Splendor: The Art of the Book in the Holy Roman Empire, ca. 800–1500;* Van Eyck to Mondrian: 300 Years of Collecting in Dresden; Ashley Bryan & Langston Hughes: Sail Away. Accessorize/Adorn thyself with something reflecting the theme of any of the exhibitions mentioned above. Advance tickets

required: \$22, Seniors \$14 at www.themorgan.org, 225 Madison Ave. @ 36th Street. Lunch at a nearby restaurant TBA. RSVP to Sandra Fisher at sfisher535@aol.com, 646-675-3608. Please include your email and cell.

Wednesday, December 8, 1 p.m.

The Juilliard School's Wednesdays at One: Lab Orchestra

Major works of orchestral repertoire. Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, 1941 Broadway @ 65th Street. Free, no tickets required.

Monday, December 13, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

The Women's Alliance Holiday Party

We are hoping to celebrate the season together, in-person, members only, in Reidy Friendship Hall. More details will be forthcoming.

Monday, January 6, 11 a.m.

Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art

This exhibition at The Jewish Museum includes objects and works by renowned artists such as Cézanne and Picasso that were looted from Jewish collections during World War II. It traces their fascinating timelines as they passed through different hands and sites before, during and after the war. The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave. @ 92nd Street. More information TK.

Women's Reading Group – Monthly, Ongoing on Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

Reading Special Interest Group (SIG)

November 9: *Hamnet*, by Maggie O'Farrell

December 14: Poetry Reading

January 11: The Four Winds, Kristin Hannah

February 8: Wintering: The Power of Retreat & Rest in Difficult Times, Katherine May

For more info, email christina.black50@gmail.com



MEMBER PROFILE: IVANA EDWARDS

By Alynne Wesson

Born in Prague and raised in Montreal, the writer, activist, preservationist and former Green Party candidate Ivana Edwards draws inspiration from her international background to fuel her work to push the United States to become a more equitable place.

She came to this country in 1971 as a young adult.

The "Number One problem" in the U.S. is our unaffordable healthcare, she says. "Thousands of people die every year because they can't afford health insurance" for early and preventative treatment. By contrast, she points out, Canada's universal healthcare makes such care available. "Because of my background, I was driven" to work for the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign of Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, "the first candidate I'd ever heard advocating for national health insurance." She invited Nader to speak at All Souls Church in 2010, and "had the great pleasure of introducing him, which I did at great length." By then Ivana had already run her own campaign as a Green Party candidate, in an unsuccessful but inspiring bid for a seat in the New York State Assembly in 2002.

She recently traveled to Albany to lobby for comprehensive health insurance in New York. That effort is ongoing. Asked if she has hope things will change soon, she answers, "Not much. The Democrats are not pushing it, and they have the power, [but] they won't oppose their funders," largely referring to unions, which, she explains, offer health insurance and would, to some degree, "become irrelevant" if such a measure were passed. Ivana does, however, have hope for change in the long term. "The Democratic Socialists think really different. I am very grateful to Bernie Sanders for influencing a lot of young people."

Ivana is also passionate about climate change, and many will remember the 2014 panel discussion she organized at All Souls in 2014. New York public radio host Brian Lehrer moderated a panel that included the leading environmentalist Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein and Chris Hedges. "Even Sen. Bernie Sanders showed up," along with other prominent climate change activists. Lines to get into the event were around the block.

Ivana's native Prague has inspired more personal pursuits. Two decades after her family emigrated, just after the communist takeover, she visited the city several times, including during the Prague Spring of 1968 and then again after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when the communist regime fell in Czechoslovakia. "It was an incredible time." By then a member of All Souls, she was delighted to discover that Prague was, before communism, the home of the world's largest Unitarian congregation. The church's founding minister, Norbert Čapek, who spoke out against the Nazis during the German occupation of Prague, was arrested and eventually executed, becoming a recognized Unitarian martyr.

Ivana's writings about Prague were published in The New York Times and led to her long tenure at the paper as a feature writer. She also published a travel book, "Praguewalks," in 1994. Her bucket list includes writing an update of that book. More locally, Ivana joined the international campaign to save the house in Manhattan where renowned Czech composer Antonín Dvořák lived from 1892-1895. The campaign was not successful, but it was able to erect a statue of Dvořák nearby in Stuyvesant Square Park. She was also involved in the international campaign to preserve and restore Bohemian National Hall, the grand turn-of-the-last-century Czech-American community center, and today a historic landmark. Early next year, she will lead a Women's Alliance outing about the Czech-American community of the Upper East Side and offer a private tour of the hall.

Currently, Ivana is hard at work researching and writing the memoirs of an intriguing New Yorker of Jewish heritage who had been a member of Čapek's Unitarian church in Prague. But perhaps most tellingly, she talks of the sustenance she receives from the music at All Souls, specifically citing the melodies of Dvořák that Director of Music Alejandro Hernandez-Valdez has presented. The song "Goin' Home" uses music from Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 (aka "New World Symphony"), which he composed in Manhattan, and which was inspired by the African-American spirituals he heard in this country. The music incorporates the best of both Ivana's native land and her chosen home.

ABORTION RIGHTS AND THE WOMEN'S ALLIANCE THE FIGHT CONTINUES

It's hard to keep up with recent assaults on abortion rights. As the Alliance Alert went to press, the newly configured U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on November 1 against Texas' extreme abortion ban, but failed to block the ban until then. On December 1 at the Supreme Court, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, the abortion ban in Mississippi will be challenged by attorneys from the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is helmed by former All Souls president Nancy Northup. Check the Upcoming Events listed in this issue for a crucial November 15 WA meeting about where we are now with abortion rights and how we got here. It features a Center for Reproductive Rights senior staff attorney and a prominent Dallas UU minister who is closely involved in the issue.

All Souls Associate Minister, the Rev. Dr. Audette Fulbright, helped put together the November 15 event. She has also helped keep All Souls current and active regarding abortion rights, for instance presenting a talking session on "the abortion stories we need to tell," as she puts it, to "normalize stories of abortion, as statistically so many of us have had one, and for so many important reasons."

In this issue of the Alert, several WA members share their work with access to abortion. Orin Kotula remembers her work with abortion patients before Roe v. Wade; Mary Geissman writes about her work with abortion patients in recent years; and Sandy Ekberg presents an essential overview of abortion activism at All Souls during the last quarter century, including highlights from the All Souls Reproductive Justice Task Force, which she co-founded with WA member Tara McNamara. Orin, Mary and Sandy all offer important thoughts for the future.

IN THE TRENCHES WHEN NEW YORK WAS A DESTINATION FOR ABORTION As Remembered by Orin Kotula

Less than three years before the Roe v. Wade decision of January 1973 that made abortion legal nationwide, albeit with restrictions, the procedure was decriminalized in New York State for pregnancies up to 24 weeks — by only one vote in the state legislature. Soon there were strong threats by the legislature to repeal the law, but abortion remained legal here, and from 1970 to early 1973, the majority of legal abortions in New York were performed on patients who came from other states where the procedure remained illegal.



"It was an amazing time," says Women's Alliance member Orin Kotula, who worked as an abortion counselor at one of the three New York City clinics that offered abortion services in the early 70s. "I'm very proud of what I did," she says. But half a century later, she admits that "on resumes, I eventually would say, 'I worked as a counselor in a women's clinic.' ... I still do." For decades she has had to face the controversy that abortion continues to entail head-on, and that has made her more aware than most how the right to a legal, safe abortion is a right that hangs by a thread.

At a rally for reproductive rights about a decade ago, "I would look around and I would see older people and think, 'Where are the younger people?' They've just taken it for granted." Now, she says, she is finally seeing more young people beginning to get involved.

Like many people her age, Orin had friends whose lives were devastated by unplanned pregnancies; one of them committed suicide. When she talks about "what's happening" with abortion rights today, she has to hold back tears. "It's going to affect people without money the most."

Con't...

Circa 1971, an abortion at the Eastern Women's Center, where Orin worked on the Upper East Side, "next to the Copacabana, around the corner from The Pierre," was \$150 — more than \$1,000 today adjusted for inflation. Many of the patients were referred by Planned Parenthood. Two vans driven by women would pick up out-of-state patients and their companions, if they had them, at local airports and bring them to the clinic. The patients would be assigned a supportive counselor and taken into individual rooms; health histories would be taken, comfort would be given, and information about contraceptives would be offered. For instance, an IUD could be inserted after the abortion. Orin and the other counselors tried their best to arrange for their patients to see the doctor who inflicted less pain than the other doctors. The patients were often very grateful to the counselors. "Some of them would write to us."



ABORTION PATIENTS STILL NEED HOSTS AND ESCORTS

By Mary Geissman

At the 2013 Women's Alliance spring event, Nancy Northup, President & CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights (and All Souls Board President at the time), spoke about her work protecting women's right to reproductive health care. At the end of her talk she was asked how we could help beyond contributing funds. She mentioned several organizations that use volunteers, including Haven Coalition, which helps abortion

patients from out of town by providing a place for them to stay.

I decided to explore volunteering with Haven and met with the coordinator, Karen Duda. She described how Haven works and basically interviewed me and asked me for personal references. Haven volunteers provide accommodations for out-of-town patients and often their accompanying family member or friend. They also escort local patients back to their own homes following their procedures. Each month volunteers are asked to sign up for one or more days when they are available to host and one or more days when they can escort. Sometimes there are no requests on the days volunteered, and sometimes there are special requests sent by email. Haven works with two clinics in Manhattan, Parkmed NYC and Planned Parenthood, and Choices Women's Medical Center in Jamaica, Queens.

I volunteered from May 2015 through January 2020, when I was in the city and available. I hosted three or four out-of-town patients. Most of my volunteering was escorting women following their procedure. Clinics will not release a patient unless they have an escort. I was notified by phone when the woman would be ready to leave, and then I would go to the clinic to meet her. Sometimes I only escorted the woman to the nearest subway station, or waited with her until she got a car service. Several times I rode the subway to Queens, the Bronx or Brooklyn and escorted the woman to her home. One woman was from upstate New York. I went with her to the Port Authority, got the bus schedule, bought her a ticket and waited with her until she boarded the bus. Although I felt that I was making only a small commitment, the women were usually very grateful for the service.

Haven is still in business, having operated through the pandemic although with fewer volunteers as well as fewer patients. I have not volunteered since early 2020, but may start again. With abortion being banned in some states now, there will be more of a need for Haven's services in the future.

A QUARTER CENTURY OF PRO-CHOICE ACTIVISM AT ALL SOULS By Sandra Ekberg

When I first attended services at All Souls in 1985, its emphasis on social justice issues was one of its attractions. At that time, AIDS was a significant issue; the Church's efforts to remove the stigma associated with that disease, along with Monday Night Hospitality and Friday Soup, motivated me to join the following year.



The granddaughter of a New York City suffragist who marched in the early 1900s, I grew up in a home that supported women's rights. As a young adult before Roe vs. Wade became law, I remember the fear young women had about possible pregnancy and illegal abortions.

All Souls has long supported women's reproductive rights and in 1995 hired one or more buses to transport members to a rally in Washington, D.C. It was a long day, with WA members Cornelia Do and Liddy Patterson staying overnight at my apartment so they would be nearer the church for a very early morning bus departure. Again in April 2004, many other All Souls members and their friends boarded three buses, once more headed to D.C. in the early morning hours, this time to join the other 1.3 million people who participated in the "March for Women's Lives." WA member Tara McNamara recalls with fondness meeting with other women a few days earlier to make signs for marchers to carry.

Formation of the All Souls Reproductive Justice Task Force

one.

Almost a decade ago, the Women's Alliance invited Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights and a member of the All Souls congregation, to be our speaker. After the meeting, Tara McNamara and I discussed her presentation. Tara, who grew up as a UU believing in women's rights and having attended both earlier marches in the Capital, was keen to form a Reproductive Justice Task Force at All Souls. The two of us agreed to join forces and launch

The Women's Alliance supported the formation of this Task Force with some funding; a catered dinner, WA-donated desserts and a program discussing the status of reproductive rights in the U.S. announced its launch to the Church. WA members Orin Kotula and the late Betty McCollum were active participants. Orin, who had worked in an abortion clinic in the early 1970s, provided guidance to others who might like to volunteer as patient escorts.

Over the next few years, we featured speakers from Planned Parenthood and other groups. The Task Force supported development of a Reproductive Justice statement for the UUA General Assembly, and we held letter-writing campaigns. We also worked with other churches in the area, primarily UU ones, and co-sponsored a benefit theater party featuring Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues." When the film "Roe at Risk: Fighting for Reproductive Justice" premiered in New York City in 2013, we organized Church members to attend.

Stories with Soul kindly offered Task Force members an opportunity to feature reproductive justice stories during Women's History Month. Our group also supported the National Abortion Network, which helps out-of-state women gain access to medical services in New York City. WA members Mary Geissman and Shellie Bailkin generously volunteered rooms in their apartments for those women who needed a place to stay while in NYC for reproductive services.

Con't . . .

The Rev. Rob Keithan, a leading UU voice in the reproductive justice movement, spoke at All Souls on a Sunday afternoon event sponsored by the Task Force. He emphasized the need to involve men in this issue. The Rev. Keithan compared the involvement of white people in the Civil Rights movement to men favoring reproductive justice, and urged all UUs to speak up about the issue; he recommends prefacing remarks with, "As a person of faith, I believe..." This is important as the opposition usually frames itself as religious, and we need to emphasize that while we too are religious, we may have a differing viewpoint.

When All Souls was offering its monthly Cinema All Souls, it partnered with us to screen "Vera Drake," a 2004 film about a British woman in the 1950s who assisted women with abortions, an action that resulted in her being jailed.

The Task Force also worked on reproductive rights beyond abortion. All Souls member Yangnim Kim, a gynecologist born in Korea, organized a comprehensive program on behalf of Korean women who had been forced into brothels by the Japanese to service their military members during WWII. More than 70 years later, the aging survivors among this group are still lobbying the Japanese government for an admission that these women were enslaved and an apology and reparations.

The Need for a Reproductive Justice Task Force Today

When Tara and I were unable to persuade others in the Church to work with us and develop programs that supported reproductive justice, we decided, with some reluctance, to disband the Task Force. Though we were unable to muster the necessary support to continue it at that time, there is no doubt about the urgent need today for our Church, our denomination, and women throughout the country to speak out NOW to legislators and others in power about maintaining Roe v. Wade, as well as state-level legislation. Support of women's right to abortion has never been greater, as legislators around the country threaten to end what was a long and hard-won victory by women who marched and advocated in the 1960s and 1970s.

IN OTHER NEWS

- → The Nominating Committee is pleased to announce the following candidates for election by the membership present at our November 15th, 2021 monthly meeting:
- Vice President Winnie Olsen
- Recording Secretary Ivana Edwards
- Treasurer Karen Steele
- → Change of Address: Sandra Fisher reports that our beloved June Castle, the longtime leader of WA's Bridge Special Interest Group, has moved into an assisted living place near her son Tony in Ridgefield, CT. June is "very pleased with the place as they have lots of activities." Her new address is:

Atria Senior Living
22 Old Quarry Road, S-231
Ridgefield, CT 06877

Her email and phone are unchanged: castlejune1@gmail.com and 646-641-6759.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

* Dan Garodnick, president and CEO of The Riverside Park Conservancy, a former 12-year New York City Council member and civil rights lawyer, spoke at the September 15 membership meeting about his new book, "Saving Stuyvesant Town." It tells the amazing story of how his Stuytown neighbors stood up to powerful real estate interests to save their homes, defeated an onerous rent tax and delivered a major affordable housing preservation win that affected not only New York City, but the whole country. The book is available on Amazon and soon will be in the public library. — Mary Ann Van Osdol

* WA members had a wonderful outing on September 29 to see *Ravishing: The Rose in Fashion* at The Museum at FIT, followed by a delightful lunch at Niles Restaurant. Highly recommended by Sandra Fisher if you are in the MSG/Macys neighborhood through November 28.

Seated: Sandra Fisher, leader, and Marilyn Reagan. L to R: Susan Hoehn, Mary Geissman, Heli Blum, Maureen Marwick, Marianne Benjamin, Deborah Brinckhoff, Joyce Elderfield, Barbara Red, new member Vivian Barondess, and Linda Lloyd.



* On October 2, Chinese student Shuo Wu appeared on Zoom from Shanghai to share her recent experiences negotiating life in New York City as a Fordham student in accounting — both before and during the pandemic. She says she learned a lot here about the need to speak up for oneself and not to be too timid to ask for help. Shuo Wu left the U.S. in January and she now works for PricewaterhouseCoopers China.

Con't . . .

* Contemporary art and flora came together on a beautiful fall day for the WA's October 13 outing to KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature at New York Botanical Garden.

L to R: MaryAnn Van Osdol, Alix Hall, Maureen Marwick, Sarah Dowson, Mary Geissman, and Sandra Fisher



* Austin Meyer, winner of the New York Times' International Reporting Trip with Nicholas Kristof competition and the recipient of a National Geographic Explorer grant to create a documentary film on infant and maternal healthcare in Zambia, gave us a sneak preview of "With Grace" at the October 18 Membership Meeting. The



spellbinding 22-minute National Geographic Society and UNFPA documentary film follows Grace Hachiswenya as she sets out to have a successful delivery in a country with some of the highest rates of infant and maternal mortality in the world. It is now available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liWB-Fn7JGg. Please consider a donation to Friends of UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health and rights agency at https://www.friendsofunfpa.org.

L to R: Austin Meyer, Grace Hachiswenya with her new baby Pamela and husband Peter.

A Final Note From the Women's Alliance Outings Committee

NYC is coming back to life! We welcome your suggestions for outings, your interest in leading an outing, and/or joining the committee. In addition to printing events here, an email will be sent to WA members 4-5 days before an event, as a reminder and to note any changes in plans.

Love to hear from you!

Sandra Fisher, chair, sfisher535@aol.com.

Committee: Maureen Marwick, Susan Hoehn, Alix Hall, and Deborah Brinckerhoff.

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The Women's Alliance (WA) is a membership organization. If you are interested in learning more about WA and its various programs and events, please email womensalliance@AllSoulsnyc.org.