



The CommUUnicator

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The March of Women

By Clint Nicely

March is the most Renaissance of months, a month when we become engulfed in the hopeful anticipation of Spring—of greenery and flowers and songbirds and of the penetrating warmth of brightening sunshine. March, as you know, is Women’s History Month, a month of tribute and celebration of the achievements and contributions of women throughout our history. And while we are thrilled to celebrate the roles women have played in the development of our modern world, we are also saddened and frustrated that the annals of history have been written in such a manner that requires us to designate a special time to remember, include, and honor the leaders and pioneers of the people who comprise more than half of our population. But that is an issue for a different discussion. Today, I wish to focus on something positive.

Therefore, I would like to consider one aspect of women’s history that is quite relevant to us: women in the Unitarian and Universalist traditions. In most all major religions, and in the various sects and denominations of those religions, women have struggled for centuries (and still do in some religious communities) to have a voice, to play a role in both the day-to-day function and practice as well as the overall administration and policy making aspects of most religious and faith-based organizations. Unitarians and Universalists have long been at the forefront in overcoming the exclusion of women from participation and leadership in

their congregations. Smart, powerful, and determined, high-achieving women have for many years found a home in the Unitarian and Universalist communities: Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, Susan B. Anthony, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Moody Emerson, Dorthea Dix, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Cody Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, Beatrix Potter, Amy Lowell, and Sylvia Plath, to name a few. Today, the Rev. Dr. Sophia Betancourt, elected to a six-year term in 2023, is the second successive woman to serve as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association. But who was first?

The history of women trying to break through the patriarchal barriers and gain a recognized role in religious communities is a long one, one of efforts often ridiculed, rejected, and reprimanded. It was the



Celebrating UU Women in History



[Click here](#) to learn the identities of these exceptional UU Women.

individual and collective courage, conviction, tenacity, and persistence of these determined early pioneering women, with a patience only women could muster, that ultimately led to their success. In 1853, Antoinette L. Brown Blackwell, at age 28, became the first woman to be ordained as a mainstream Protestant minister in the United States. She was ordained by the Congregational Church of Henrietta, New York, but that ordainment was never recognized or sanctioned by the greater Congregational denomination. After several years, Blackwell quit the Congregational Church and became a Unitarian. In 1863, Olympia Brown, citing Blackwell as a role model, became the first woman in the United States to be ordained as clergy with the official approval of a full national denomination, The Universalist Church. Later in that same year of 1863, the Universalists ordained Augusta Chapin. And in 1871, the Unitarians ordained Celia Burleigh and Mary Graves. The history of women fighting their way into the ranks of the American clergy is a long and complicated one, far more so than just the few focal UU highpoints listed here.

The Unitarian Universalist Association, consisting of nearly 1100 Churches, Congregations, Fellowships, and Societies, now lists more than 60% of its ministers as women, the highest of any national denomination, and the UUA has by far the largest number of women in major leadership positions at the national level of any denomination. So, as our nation has celebrated women's history this month, we should also celebrate our UU heritage. Try if you can to imagine our own UUFW without the

leadership of the many brilliant and capable women we so depend on. Perhaps The March of Women is a time to honor, to celebrate, and to thank the women of our own fortunate UU community.

The sources for this article include the [UUA website](#) and [The Encyclopedia of Women Social Reformers, vols 1 & 2, by Helen Rappaport](#)

Irish Music Night



The Old Favorites, Rae and Steve Kasdan, Phyllis and Jim Gaskins and Brent Holl, brought their up-beat, chase-away-your-cares Irish music to UUFW on Saturday. The hall was decorated with lots of green, daffodils and candles for a cheerful ambiance. A variety of baked goodies were enjoyed at intermission by members and several guests. Thank you to everyone who came for the evening and donated to the \$805 raised for the Fellowship.

Vernal
 phlox of sheep
 meander the meadow
 from heards of sparrows
 song is hurled
 from the spring
 burbles the brook
 sap of windward
 sugars the whirled
 Joe Good

