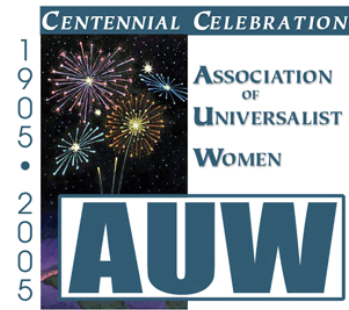


AUW Centennial Chronicle

The Association of Universalist Women (AUW) continues the celebration of its 100th anniversary, featuring a brief historical note by decade and the profile of a distinguished member from that time.



Fight for Reproductive Rights¹ **AUW Decade 7: 1965-1974**

In 1965 abortion was illegal except in dire circumstances, so induced and back-alley abortions were common. AUW program topics included teen pregnancy, abortion legislation, child abuse, juvenile justice, lobbying, the environment, and nuclear weapons. In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that women have a constitutional right to choose abortion. Within eight weeks, legislation to overturn Roe versus Wade had been introduced. Betty Benjamin served the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF) from 1972-1976 as the official advocate for "Responsible Abortion Laws."

Biography of Betty Waidelich Benjamin **(1924-2004)**

Betty Mae Waidelich was born on her family's farm in Minnesota. She graduated, Valedictorian, from a small country school. Betty's family attended the Morgan Methodist Church where she played piano and participated in the youth group. She attended Hamline University in St. Paul and met Bob Benjamin in freshman English class. Bob's education was interrupted by service as a pilot in World War II. The couple married in 1947, and Betty worked as a social worker while Bob attended medical school at the University of Minnesota. They lived in Oregon for a while before returning to Minnesota.



Betty and Bob began attending First Universalist Church in 1958. Betty served as chair of religious education, trustee of the board (six years), president of AUW (twice), chair of the Unity Settlement Foundation and chair of the financial canvass.

Betty joined the fledgling movement to legalize abortion after attending a seminar on teen pregnancy at church in 1967. In 1971 Betty was a founding member of the Minnesota Council for the Legal Termination of Pregnancy (MORAL). She was president for seventeen years as the organization's name kept evolving to reflect the changing abortion laws--to today's NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota. In 1999, on Betty's 75th birthday, Minnesota NARAL established a foundation in her honor to provide training for future leaders. In 2004, the AUW honored Betty Benjamin, Sharon Bishop and Dru Cummins with an engraved plaque in Washington, D.C. while providing funds for the *Clara Barton Internship for Women's Issues* to train tomorrow's leaders in the Office for Advocacy.

Over forty First Universalist members joined Betty and a million others in Washington D.C. for a pro-choice march last April, one week before Betty's 80th birthday and nine weeks before her death.

¹ History and biography researched and written by Mary Junge and edited by Jennifer Thomas.