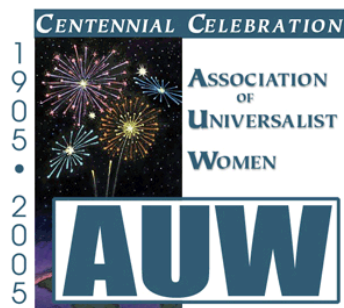


AUW Centennial Chronicle

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.



Decade 9: 1985-1994¹

During this decade the AUW became very intentional in networking to become a force supportive of women. The organization made alliances with the Minnesota Women's Consortium, the Women's Press, and Chrysalis. It grappled with challenging topics like comparable worth, pornography, hunger, and domestic abuse. In 1985, AUW hosted the fourth annual Celebration of Light, a ritual group it started, which is now called the Winter Solstice Celebration. By the end of this decade, nearly half of all UU ministers were female.

The Glass Ceiling Cracks

Historically, our denomination led the way for women. Every university and college founded by Universalists was open to women from the beginning—Tufts, Bucknell, St. Lawrence, Washington University, and more. By the time women got the vote in 1920, Universalists had ordained eighty-seven women to the ministry and Unitarians had ordained thirty-two. All other denominations combined had ordained less than a half-dozen women. Then, after a very robust beginning, female ministers in the first half of the twentieth century diminished almost completely. Official leadership by females was sparse in our church until 1960 when Myrna Hansen was elected board president; a succession of female leaders followed.

The UU Women's Federation and some of our AUW members pioneered the empowerment and reentry of women in the UU ministry. A pivotal turn occurred in 1970, when a General Assembly resolution was passed calling for inclusive language and equal participation by women in the denomination. The first Ministry to Women Award was given to Gloria Steinem and Pat Carbine of Ms. Magazine in 1972. The award had been the brainchild of Dru Cummins who, with her board from that period, received the Ministry to Women Award in 2000. Both the AUW and the national UU Women's Federation have provided effective training grounds for women who later took leadership roles in the church and the denomination.

In an essay written thirteen years ago for her alma mater, Mount Holyoke, Dru Cummins wrote this about the empowerment of women in the denomination: *The stained glass ceiling had cracked, and in rapid succession I was elected trustee of the Unitarian Universalist Association, second vice moderator, first vice moderator, and chair of several committees. These positions also gave me opportunities to empower other women. I later served as the first woman chair of the board of our graduate theological school at the University of Chicago, Meadville Lombard, and I led a campaign to elect the first woman president of our denomination. I had been empowered by our liberating faith, and by women and men who share that faith.*²

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

² From an essay written by Dru Cummins for the *Mount Holyoke Quarterly* in 1992.