

Women's Rights - 1981

Issue

- 1) Securing equal rights for women.
- 2) Right of personal choice on abortion.
- 3) Elimination of discrimination against women in all nations.

Background

1) In spite of nearly a century of work to secure a Constitutional guarantee of equal rights for U.S. women, passage of the ERA is in question. Although there are other legislative guarantees relating to equal economic opportunities and fair employment practices, to name but two, the effect of such legislation has not realized equal treatment for women. This underscores the necessity for the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, which makes explicit that there can be no discrimination on the basis of sex. The Constitution of the United States is amended through a process of state ratification. In spite of tremendous efforts over the more than 8 years that the ERA has been pending, and because of the effective efforts of foes of the ERA, its passage is in jeopardy. Only 35 of the necessary 38 states have ratified the ERA.

2) Preserving the right of choice in regard to abortions relates to several issues: Separation of Church and State, right of privacy, and for Canadian women to see that abortion remains an issue not to be determined by the Constitution, to name a few.

Cognizant of the value of a pluralistic society and the many divergent theological positions regarding abortion, NFTS has long fought to protect abortion rights as a religious freedom. Participation in the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights has been a primary vehicle for this work. At this time there is real danger that a "human life amendment" or a "human life statute" will pass in the United States Congress.

3) The United Nations Decade for Women has been an important means to create and sustain interest in the needs of women. It has and will provide opportunities for women everywhere to work toward common goals. However we regret the politicization and polarization, for extraneous and destructive purposes, of the Mexico and Copenhagen Conferences, particularly in relation to Israel, nevertheless we are committed to the goals of improving the economic, social and political status of women throughout the world.

Resolution

1) From its beginnings, Reform Judaism has recognized that women should assume religious obligations equal to those of men. As members of the Reform community, with equality of and responsibilities often pre-dating those of our secular society, we affirm our obligations to work towards equality for women and men.

Therefore, we urge United States Sisterhoods to vigorously pursue every avenue which may achieve ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. We call particularly upon our sisterhoods in the states of Illinois, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Virginia to work for ratification by their State legislatures. While NFTS works with the Religious Committee for the ERA as a priority, all Sisterhoods are urged to work with the RCERA and other agencies which share the common goal to adopt the ERA. If, in spite of all efforts, ratification is not secured by June 30, 1982 (the deadline date), Sisterhoods are urged to: (a) insure that gains already achieved by women, whether in the public or private sector, are maintained, and (b) work for and support legislative efforts to secure equality for women.

While the passage of the ERA is an issue specifically in the United States, affiliates in our worldwide federation, as well as in the U.S., are urged to work for the establishment, maintenance and funding of agencies and programs which meet the needs of women. Examples are: shelters for battered and abused women, day-care centers, is placed homemaker programs, equal employment and educational opportunities.

2) The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods affirms its commitment to the value of family and the specific values which Judaism teaches. At the same time we are committed to laws and societal attitudes which allow women options as to how they live their lives. Sisterhoods must be the vehicle for education and understanding of how to guarantee these options while maintaining and creating life styles in consonance with Jewish values.

We urge that Sisterhoods and their members, in the United States particularly, continue their commitment and their vigorous action programs to resist any legislation which would overturn the Supreme Court decision on the right of choice on abortion while maintaining their vigilant attention to the myriad legislative efforts to subvert the Supreme Court decision.

3) In each country where our Federation has members, Sisterhoods' obligations and responsibilities are not only to meet their own needs but to be concerned with women throughout the world. The United Nations Decade for Women has been a means to sustain interest in the needs of women. We do not condone the radical politicization which occurred at the Women's meetings in Mexico City (1975) and Copenhagen (1980), but as citizens of our respective countries we nevertheless urge our governments to help provide the necessary funds and personnel for appropriate programs focused on women in developing nations.