



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM

GUIDE FOR SISTERHOOD PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

This guide provides programming recommendations to help your Sisterhood implement the following resolutions and statements, adopted since May 2004.

- [Child and Adolescent Self Destructive Behavior](#), 45th Assembly, 2005
- [Ending Global Poverty](#), Executive Committee, 2006
- [Healthcare Issue: Weight Matters—Obesity, the Most Serious Nutritional Problem in North America](#), Board of Directors, 2004
- [Rights of Minority Voices in the Senate](#), Board of Directors, 2005
- [Scientific Integrity](#), 45th Assembly, 2005
- [Tax and Budget Concerns](#), Board of Directors, 2005
- [Worker Justice](#), Board of Directors, 2004

WRJ resolutions, adopted by Assembly Delegates, the WRJ Board of Directors or the Executive Committee, are grounded in Jewish values and are the basis for our critical issues action, advocacy, and community services.

GENERAL PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Devote a few moments at each board meeting to discuss a current WRJ resolution.
- Prepare bulletin articles on the issues, using the resolutions and information sent with WRJ alerts.
- Use WRJ stands on issues as program ideas for membership meetings and study sessions.
- Provide program speakers with relevant resolutions and other WRJ resources on the subject. Introduce programs with information about WRJ critical issues and close the meeting with information about action on the issue taken by WRJ and your Sisterhood.
- Establish a Critical Issues Committee.
- Develop community service projects that respond to the issues delineated in the resolutions. The [Or Ami website](#) is a useful source of program ideas.

GENERAL ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

Many resolutions involve WRJ in taking positions on federal issues. Others may require monitoring and advocacy at state, provincial, and local levels. WRJ e-mail alerts are sent to sisterhoods when their advocacy action is needed. Respond to these alerts as quickly as possible.

- Follow federal and local issues on the media and internet.
- Keep clipping files on current and emerging issues.

- Participate in community coalitions that support positions taken by WRJ.
- Since 9/11 it has been more efficient to call, FAX or send e-mails to your legislators. Contact information can be obtained at the websites for the [House](#) and [Senate](#). WRJ e-mail alerts often include links to electronic systems of communication with government officials.

RESOURCES: YOUR TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

All WRJ resources are available through the [WRJ website](#).

- [WRJ Resolutions and statements](#) adopted since 1915.
- [About Social Justice at WRJ](#), discusses WRJ's views on various issues and historical involvement.
- [Or Ami "Light of My People" Award for Excellence in Sisterhood Programming](#), includes brief descriptions of outstanding sisterhood programs that are excellent models for replication.
- The [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism \(RAC\)](#), maintains a comprehensive website on the issues.

SOME IMPORTANT ADVOCACY INFORMATION

Call your members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121.

The White House can be reached at 202.456.1111. Addresses for Senators and Representatives follow, but as noted above, it has been more efficient to send your letter by fax or e-mail.

Address written communications to officials as follows:

TO A SENATOR:

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (last name):

Sincerely yours,
Name, include address

TO A REPRESENTATIVE:

The Honorable (Full Name)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (last name):

Sincerely yours,
Name, include address

TO THE PRESIDENT:

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Respectfully yours,
Name and address

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR, 45th Assembly, 2005

Judaism clearly teaches that no one has complete ownership of his or her own body. God gives a person his or her body for safekeeping.

(Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Chovel u'Mazik 5:1)

WRJ 45th Assembly delegates resolved to address the increase in self-destructive behavior among our children and adolescents by collaborating with the Union for Reform Judaism Department of Jewish Family Concerns (JFC): to develop resources and programmatic responses for camps, youth groups, and congregations; to assure that such materials are used to help families struggling with self-destructive behaviors; and to encourage the Union for Reform Judaism to provide age-appropriate sexuality education in our religious schools. This resolution refers to a project in development, so watch for e-mails and announcements with more information.

Recommended sisterhood programming and action

- Distribute (JFC) background and programmatic resources and information to clergy, school directors, teachers, and youth group leaders, on the crisis of pervasive self-destructive behavior to assure that they can recognize any overt signs of such behaviors.
- Work closely with WRJ and JFC programming staff and your clergy to plan a sisterhood panel program on self-destructive behavior.
- Include information from WRJ and JFC in newsletters to alert members and other adult congregants to the existence, extent, and ramifications of the problem.
- Meet with temple youth group adult leaders to assure that our children and adolescents are offered safe and confidential settings for their open and frank discussions.
- Provide local school district administrators and healthcare professionals with literature recommended by WRJ and JFC to bring about an awareness of this critical issue.
- Work with your congregation's clergy and professional staff to help identify and disseminate the names of appropriate local resources, individuals, and agencies, qualified and equipped to work with children and adolescents, parents, guardians, and families on the issue of self-destructive behavior.

ENDING GLOBAL POVERTY, Executive Committee, 2006

There is no lot which is harder than poverty...

(Exodus R., *Mishpatim*, XXXI, 12)

For many nations this is a time of unparalleled wealth and prosperity, yet globally more than 800 million people go hungry every day—300 million are children—more than one billion people lack access to clean drinking water; and 2.6 billion live without basic sanitation facilities. Women make up the largest percentage of those in the poorest population quintile worldwide. The internationally adopted Millennium Development Goals seek to halve global poverty by 2015.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming

- Hold an informative program on the Millennium Development Goals as a practical and effective means to end global poverty. For information, go to the [Millennium Campaign website](#). For speakers contact your local university international studies or economics departments and ask your rabbi to discuss what the Jewish tradition says about alleviating poverty.

- Organize a study group on the implications of the Millennium Development Goals as a pathway to gender equality for women. Contact [UN Women](#) for information.
- Set up a sisterhood work group to help identify Fair Trade Certified products and encourage their use. For information about Fair Trade certification go to the [Fair Trade USA website](#). When consumers see a product with the Fair Trade Certified label, they are guaranteed that farmers received a fair price and the other benefits of the Fair Trade system, including decent working and living conditions.
- Support the work of international relief organizations including, but not limited to, [American Jewish World Service](#), [MAZON](#), and the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#).

HEALTHCARE ISSUE: WEIGHT MATTERS—OBESITY, THE MOST SERIOUS NUTRITIONAL PROBLEM IN NORTH AMERICA, Board of Directors, 2004

*The body is the soul's house.
Shouldn't we therefore take care of our
house so that it will not fall into ruin?
(Philo, 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.)*

Women of Reform Judaism urges its affiliated sisterhoods to inform members, congregations and communities about the increasing prevalence of obesity, which is one of the leading causes of death in North America, and to take action to stem the problem.

Recommended programming and action

- Plan a Sisterhood program featuring a panel discussion on the relationship between diet, physical activity and health:
 - Invite a local physician to discuss current thinking about health and disease prevention;
 - Invite a nutritionist to discuss current trends in healthy diets;
 - Invite an exercise physiologist to explain the importance of regular exercise; and
 - Serve only heart healthy snacks.
- Develop programming for sisterhoods that encourages weight control, provides knowledge about healthful nutrition based on current research and emphasizes more active lifestyles:
 - Invite a nutritionist to discuss the U.S. Department of Agriculture [Choose My Plate website](#), ways to calculate caloric content of daily menus, and how to use the website to tailor the plate to your own health needs. Canadian nutrition information can be found at [Health Canada](#);
 - Hold a healthy pot luck dinner with the ingredients listed on a display card;
 - Create a low fat calorie conscious Healthy Jewish Cookbook with heart healthy menus or revise existing cookbooks to reflect current ideas about healthy fats and including more vegetables and fruits. Provide nutritional information for all recipes; and

- Establish a healthy heart group. Sign up together to take the “[Presidents Challenge](#).”
- Join other community groups to seek local, state and provincial legislation regarding nutrition and physical activity and urge schools in your communities to:
 - Revamp rules on foods that public schools serve their students;
 - Restrict access to junk food in schools; and
 - Encourage school systems to add or maintain physical education programs.

RIGHTS OF MINORITY VOICES IN THE SENATE, Board of Directors, 2005

Justice, justice shall you pursue,

(Deuteronomy 16:20)

Women of Reform Judaism opposes the “nuclear option” to end the filibuster because the Senate’s role to advise and consent is fundamental to the future of rights and liberties in our nation. This role requires that the voices of the congressional minority be heard.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- Hold a sisterhood program on the importance of the filibuster to democracy in the United States. Invite a political scientist from a neighboring university to speak.
- Respond quickly to WRJ and RAC alerts to take action when necessary to protect the rights of minority voices in the Senate.

SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY, 45th Assembly, 2005

A truth, established by proof, does not gain in force from the support of scholars; nor does it lose its certainty because of popular dissent.

(Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed)

The successful application of science has played a large part in the policies that have made our nation strong and our citizens prosperous and healthy. Scientific research must be interpreted from an impartial perspective to avoid erroneous applications which might lead to harmful decisions that negatively affect our land and our people.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- Develop programs that provide resources and information about important science issues.
- Set up a three or four session study group of at least 90 minutes each to discuss in depth issues over which there is controversy, inviting knowledgeable members of the congregation, local high school science teachers or colleges to lead a session on the area of their expertise. Select your topics from the accompanying text box.

- Monitor government websites, as urged by WRJ alerts, and compare the information contained to that sent by WRJ and our coalition partners. If there are inaccuracies or discrepancies, respond to the appropriate agencies, as requested by WRJ.
- Respond quickly to WRJ alerts supporting the appointment of scientists and physicians to government positions and advisory boards on the basis of their scientific expertise, accomplishments, and open-mindedness and challenging the appointment of those who do not meet these criteria or who are not free of ties to industries with a vested interest in the subject of inquiry.

TAX AND BUDGET CONCERNS, Board of Directors, 2005

Share your bread with the hungry....

(Isaiah 58:7)

Concerned about the impact of the Administration's tax and budget policies, WRJ calls for their rejection and supports an equitable tax policy that will provide sufficient funding for pressing federal, state and local public needs and strengthen the economy. Recent federal tax policy has provided for massive tax cuts that will primarily benefit the most affluent in our society at the expense of essential government programs for poor families, such as major cuts in the Medicaid program and in the budget for Head Start, education, housing and nutrition programs. The tax cuts also pave the way for an exploding national debt and have created enormous deficits, indebting our children and grandchildren.

Recommended Sisterhood Advocacy

- Call on Congress, as requested by WRJ alerts, to protect the safety net for the poor, such as child nutrition programs, Medicaid, education and adult literacy programs, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, Head Start, and housing programs.
- Hold a sisterhood program on tax policies that benefit the well-to-do while requiring cuts in social programming and causing increases in the deficit. Ask your rabbi to talk about the Jewish perspective, invite a local economist or policy analyst (for speakers call the local universities or Jewish Community Relations Councils).
- Follow tax and budget issues in the press and media and respond to alerts that call on Congress to protect the vital social programs that respond to fundamental needs of all Americans, particularly the poor.

WORKER JUSTICE, Board of Directors, 2004

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow country-man or a stranger in one of the communities of your land.

Deuteronomy 24:14 Issue

Many workers in both the U.S. and Canada are unable to provide for their own basic needs and those of their families despite working full-time at jobs that are vital to our nations. Today many productive workers still live in, or on the edge of, poverty. Jewish tradition clearly demands that workers be reimbursed adequately for their labor and

that they not be abused. Today this means ensuring safe and clean working conditions, a fair wage, adequate insurance coverage and benefits. Women of Reform Judaism resolves to seek legislation to require a living wage, health coverage and other benefits for all workers.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Provide a copy of this resolution to your rabbis and ask them to give a talk at one of your program meetings on the Jewish mandate that we are all responsible for the treatment of those who work for us.
- Establish a group of sisterhood members to do research on the working conditions of service providers, production workers, and migrant farm workers in or near your community. This can be done by following articles and reports in the media, speaking with local government officials or contacting [Interfaith Worker Justice \(IWJ\)](#).
- Advocate legislation, local or federal, that would:
 - Protect women in the special visa for domestic employment category to prevent abuse; and
 - Require adequate pay, working conditions and employee benefits to support a stable workforce that can provide quality care for long-term care consumers.