



4/21/10

**GUIDE FOR SISTERHOOD PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY
Put WRJ Resolutions and Statements to Work in Your
Sisterhood**

This Women of Reform Judaism advocacy and programming guide is provided to help your sisterhood implement WRJ's most recent resolutions and policy statements.

Look over the guide for ideas about exciting programs and advocacy to involve your members!

The webpage [Resolutions and statements](#) includes links for the following WRJ resolutions and statements adopted since May 2008:

- [Elder Abuse](#), 2009
- [Food Production and Distribution](#), 2009
- [Immigration](#), 2009
- [Child Marriage](#), 2009
- [Economic Priorities for the New Administration and Congress](#), 2009
- [Paid Sick Leave](#), 2008

Elder Abuse, WRJ 47th Assembly, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009

R. Simeon b. Yohai said, "...the most difficult of all mitzvot is 'Honor your father and your mother....'" (Tanhuma Ekev, 2).

In this resolution WRJ urges affiliates to: present programs about elder abuse; work with coalitions to develop respite care programs; call on the medical community to be alert to signs of potential abuse; assist in accessing, evaluating, and monitoring the quality of home, community-based, and institutional care; assist with efforts to make women's shelters accessible for abused older women; and support legislation to protect elders from abuse and provide the means to respond.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Watch for and respond to WRJ Wednesday alerts to support the Elder Justice Act and other federal legislation dealing with elder abuse. Monitor state/provincial legislation that provides resources for dealing with elder abuse. Feature information about such legislation in your newsletters.
- Hold a panel program for your congregation with experts in the field of elder abuse. You may want to adapt the program held by Beth Am Women, Los Altos Hills, CA, "The Jewish Response to Elder Abuse and Neglect: Shedding Light on a Critical Community Issue" on March 2, 2010. The panel included an attorney, their rabbi, a Probate Court judge, and representatives from the county Adult Protective Services, Public Guardian, and District Attorney's offices. (Contact [Linda C. Kramer](#) for information). Ask speakers to bring informational brochures for distribution.
- Invite a gerontologist from a hospital and/or UJA Federation long-term care programs in your community and your rabbi for an evening event to discuss signs of elder abuse. Make personal calls to invite the doctors and nurses in your community to attend the program.
- Develop a committee on elder abuse, [using National Council on Aging \(NCOA\) resources](#), and work with your clergy and community elder services office to develop a project on ways sisterhood women and congregants could assist congregational families in accessing, evaluating, and/or monitoring the quality of home, community-based, and institutional care.
- The UJA Federation agencies in many communities and long term care facilities have set up elder abuse committees, conferences, and programs. [Contact your local UJA Federation](#) or coalition on aging to plan joint programming or to assess your community's need for respite care programs or shelter availability for the elderly.

Food Production and Distribution, WRJ 47th Assembly, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.... The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning (Leviticus 19:9-13).

This resolution calls on sisterhoods to: seek legislation to monitor working conditions, environmental issues, and strengthen food safety standards in food processing facilities; encourage members to use the fresh foods available at local farmers' markets and create their own gardens, sharing the produce with local food banks; and educate members to use "fair trade" items and sell them in sisterhood Judaica shops.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Set up a study group to become informed, monitor the press and media, and report to your sisterhood and congregation about working conditions and food safety – the following links will provide excellent background resources:
 - [The US Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration](#), OSHA, is responsible for setting up labor standards and monitoring workplaces;
 - [Interfaith Worker Justice \(IWJ\)](#) is a network that focuses on worker issues. An upcoming resource, Orbis Books' April publication [A Worker Justice Reader: Essential Writings on Religion and Labor](#), is an anthology compiled by IWJ could be very helpful to a worker justice study group; and
 - [Regulatory Lapses Inflate Health Care Costs, Reports Find](#) discusses the health costs of food borne illnesses.
- Take action on WRJ and other organizational alerts to call upon the U.S. government to enforce existing OSHA regulations, increase penalties for OSHA violations, and pass food safety legislation.
- Create sisterhood events that showcase healthy eating and use of locally grown produce. Hold green holiday events, such as a Pesach women's Seder or Sukkot supper and ask each attendee to bring a vegetable dish and copies of their recipe to share with other attendees.
- Hold a one session reading group on "Earthcare: An Ethical Culture Designed to Save Our Planet & Ourselves," an article from the winter 2009 issue of *Reform Judaism*.
- Sell fair trade items in your Judaica shops and place an ad featuring them in your temple newsletter. Locate distributors on the [Fairtrade USA](#) website.
- [Hazon](#) maintains a website for Jewish food movement programming and information about the ramifications of food choices. The website includes

program ideas for religious schools, families, and adults, which can be adapted to your sisterhood's interests and needs.

- Ask members to bring a fair trade donation item to your membership lunch or dinner or major fundraiser next year:
 - The [Fairtrade USA](#) website provides information about certified fair trade foods and the markets at which they are available;
 - The process of finding and purchasing the fair trade items will increase participants' awareness of their availability;
 - Check with your local food banks to find out what they need of the available fair trade items in your community and ask your attendees to purchase those items. Contribute most of the donated items to the food banks; and
 - Place a portion of the donated items in attractive baskets for use as door prizes.

Immigration, WRJ 47th Assembly, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009

When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens (Leviticus 19:33-34).

The WRJ immigration reform resolution advocates legislation that includes: a path to legalization for undocumented immigrants; humane treatment for all detained immigrants, including medical care and educational services for detained children; end mass workplace raids and warrantless home invasions; increase the number of visas for unskilled workers; and streamline the processes for visa renewal and family reunification.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Educate yourself and your sisterhood leaders about the immigration reform debate. Many websites provide current information about the debate; the [National Immigration Forum](#) is comprehensive, thorough, and informative.
- Ask your programming and advocacy chair to identify someone in your sisterhood to monitor the immigration news and to organize action when necessary. Ask them to report on the status of the debate at sisterhood meetings to keep everyone in the loop.
- Watch for and respond to advocacy alerts on immigration reform:
 - The Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009, which includes the provisions sought by WRJ's resolution on immigration, was introduced in the House of Representatives on December 15, 2009;
 - On March 15, 2010 the Refugee Protection Act of 2010 was introduced in the Senate. This bill would bring asylum and refugee processing up to date;
 - Senators Schumer and Graham [published a draft framework for action](#) on immigration reform as a op-ed in The Washington Post on March 19th; and
 - Monitor state and local media for initiatives regarding immigration and weigh in on them.
- Ask your rabbi to do a sermon on immigration policy.

Statement on Child Marriage, WRJ Board of Directors, June 2009

This board statement urges Congress and the administration to protect girls worldwide from the hazards of early marriage on their health and lives with legislation that calls for diplomatic and programmatic efforts to prevent child marriage. We call on our affiliates to advocate legislation and develop programs on seeking just and healthy lives for women and girls globally.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Become informed by holding programs on the dangers of child marriage for girls. Useful resources can be found as follows:
 - [UNICEF's Child Marriage](#) information sheet and the Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse section on child marriage;
 - The International Center for Research on Women [website](#) includes extensive resources, including much information, talking points, a power point presentation, and a video; and
 - "NOW on PBS" focused a 2007 program on child marriage. You can view the program on the [website](#), which is also very informative.
- Watch for WRJ alerts related to child marriage and take timely action. This could include calls for action on:
 - The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009 has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and Senate. It would implement programmatic and diplomatic strategies to work towards the elimination of child marriage. The programmatic initiatives include efforts in education, health, and income generation;
 - Foreign aid reform. Women and children are among the poorest of the global population. In much of the world women are not free to earn an income, feed their families, or protect themselves and their children from violence. U.S. foreign assistance needs to be invested in economic opportunities for women, to lift them, their families, and communities out of poverty. Learn more at [Women Thrive Worldwide](#).

Economic Priorities for the New Administration and Congress, WRJ Executive Committee, 2009

"If there is a needy person among you... do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient" (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

The WRJ Executive Committee called on the new administration and Congress to rapidly deploy urgently needed social and economic justice programs and a new emergency stimulus package and urged U.S. sisterhoods to call on Congress and the administration to do so as quickly as possible. Although the statement called for an economic stimulus package, which was adopted and implemented to some extent, and a health care reform bill, which was adopted in March 2010, it remains essential to monitor and respond to economic and social justice issues.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Reach out to members of your sisterhood and congregation to form a ring comprised of women attorneys, social workers, and others interested in social policy. Call them individually to participate. Ask them to:
 - Monitor social and economic justice issues in the media or on the internet;
 - Do monthly five minute briefings at sisterhood board and membership meetings on current social justice concerns and bring resources, such as talking points distributed by WRJ in the weekly social justice e-mails; and
 - Provide alerts to enable sisterhood women to take action on the issues.

Paid Sick Leave, WRJ Board of Directors, 2008

"You shall not abuse the needy or destitute laborer, whether a countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Eternal against you and you will incur guilt"

(Deuteronomy 24: 14-15).

This statement calls for legislation that requires employers to provide paid sick days for employees use when they are ill or to care for family and or household members. It also calls on sisterhoods to work with local coalitions to campaign for paid sick days and to work with congregational leadership to assure their provision for temple employees.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Action

- Review and discuss the resolution and provide background information at a sisterhood meeting. Distribute comprehensive background information on the need for paid sick leave, including fact sheets, from the [National Partnership for Women & Families](#).
- Look into state and federal legislation, adopted or pending. For information about legislation in your city or state, go to paysickdays.org and click on the map of the United States. Work with coalitions on the issue in your state.
- Take action as urged by Women of Reform Judaism and Religious Action Center alerts.
- Speak with congregational leaders to find out about current sick leave policies in your temple. If sick leave is available thank them for their commitment to social justice. If not, provide them with our resolution and information about the need for paid sick leave. In addition, urge them to study the issue and the needs of temple employees, and implement a fair sick leave policy.

WRJ Advocacy Resources: Your Tools for Effective Programming and Advocacy

- [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.