

International Year of Older Persons

To save the life of one human being is as though one saved the world. (M. Sanhedrin IV, 5)

Issue

In today's world, older persons are often confronted with special challenges: attitudes of society, health concerns, economic security, housing, transportation, intergenerational relations and isolation. The 1999 International Year of Older Persons provides a significant framework for advocacy and action on behalf of the millions making up the rapidly-growing aging population in both developed and developing countries.

Background

A number of United Nations studies in the early 1970s provided startling demographic projections. They showed that between 1970 and the turn of the century, the developed regions of the world would see a 50% increase in the number of older citizens. For the less developed countries, the increase was projected to be 150%.

In 1982 the United Nations World Assembly on Aging was held in Vienna and developed a document "Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging." The General Assembly, in 1990, endorsed the action program on aging for 1992 and beyond, and designated October 1st as the International Day of Older Persons. Noting the unprecedented aging of populations taking place throughout the world, the General Assembly in October 1992 decided to observe the year 1999 as International Year of Older Persons. It proposed the unifying theme "towards a society for all ages." Among the core concerns for further attention are: the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development and multigenerational relations. The overall objective of the year is the promotion of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which are organized into five clusters: independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. The translation of the principles into reality will require both an initiative by older persons and the establishment of an enabling environment by the rest of society.

Initiatives by Non-Governmental Organizations, among them Women of Reform Judaism, can increase awareness of the life and needs of older persons, as well as the particular needs of older women who have fewer entitlements than men while outliving them in most countries. Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) is admirably suited to creating partnerships on behalf of older persons.

The year 1999 may be considered a "year of celebration" and opportunity: to increase awareness of the new era of the aging, as well as to influence governments, policy-makers, non-governmental organizations, the media; to change stereotypes and attitudes; and to promote interaction between generations.

Resolution

In keeping with our religious tradition which mandates respect for our elders, and in consonance with prior resolutions related to the United Nations, Women of Reform Judaism supports the Proclamation "1999 The United Nations International Year of Older Persons—A Society for All Ages."

Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its affiliates to:

1) Promote programs for The 1999 United Nations International Year of Older Persons which will highlight needs of older persons and which will continue after the international year.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

- 2) Educate their members about the impact that the great advances in science and technology have made upon the lives of older persons.
- 3) Disseminate information about new theories of prevention and treatment of aging-related illnesses such as heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and cancer, as well as preventive nutrition and exercise.
- 4) Raise awareness of the social changes which make the future of family care and the services to fill the gap uncertain, especially the situation of older women who tend to live longer and have fewer resources and societal entitlements.
- 5) Monitor closely national, state, provincial and local legislatures for possible changes to existing legislation and advocate programs which are adequate to serve those in need.
- 6) Implement intergenerational programs and workshops in the congregation and community.
- 7) Motivate sisterhoods to face and address problems of physical and mental abuse of elders which exist within the Jewish community as well as the secular world.
- 8) Facilitate the attendance at services and synagogue activities by the elderly, including residents of retirement communities and daycare centers.