

# Women's fundraiser tea will cover costs of abortion

By Pat Gee Honolulu Star Advertiser 10/15/11



COURTESY OF FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HONOLULU  
Sheila O'Keefe, Catherine Graham, Mickey Selwyn and Noreen Chun will take part in First Unitarian Church of Honolulu's women's fundraising tea today to benefit a loan program for Planned Parenthood Hawaii.

A fundraising tea today at First Unitarian Church of Honolulu will support a loan program that helps low-income women gain access to abortion services.

"We've been really supportive of the right of every woman to choose," said the Rev. Jonipher Kwong, pastor of the Nuuanu church. "We're not saying the only choice is to terminate a pregnancy, but ultimately it is up to the woman to choose what to do with her own body."

The Honolulu Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation is the official sponsor of the tea, first held in 2008, according to Charlotte Huszcza, spokeswoman for the church at 2500 Pali Highway.

But support by church members began in 2000 with a \$4,700 seed grant for a loan program for low-income women called "Wahine Choice" under Planned Parenthood of Hawaii.

Former church members Jo Ashmore and Noreen Chun were instrumental in establishing a continuing stream of funding for Wahine Choice that has totaled about \$9,000 since 2000, Huszcza said. The donations account for about 15 percent of the Wahine Choice fund, which has helped about 300 women, Huszcza said.

In 1987, the congregation adopted a resolution endorsing the freedom of reproductive choice and reaffirmed it in 1992 and 2007. In 2008 Planned Parenthood presented the church with its top annual honor, the Bette Takahashi Service Award, Huszcza said.

"Most women are able to pay back the amount they received over time," she said. "That money goes back into the fund to help future patients in need of high-quality and nonjudgmental health care. In tough economic times, more women than ever need access to essential health care services."

Kwong acknowledged there is considerable theological debate as to when a life begins, but added, "For me, life begins when a child is born and is able to breathe on his or her own."

"Unitarians do have a deep reverence for life, but it's also about revering the life of a woman and making sure she has healthy choices. We are called to stand on the side of love, allowing the freedom of choice, and at some level, we have to agree to disagree with other religions that don't think the same way."

Kwong said the Unitarian-Universalist church, founded in 16th-century Europe and brought to America by the Puritans, is "no stranger to controversies." The church has historically been a strong advocate for the abolition of slavery, and has championed equal rights for women and people of all races, he said.

The church adheres to seven principles that promote beliefs including "the inherent worth and dignity of every person; (and) justice, equity and compassion in human relations," he said.

"We believe in the oneness of God and universal salvation, that a loving God is too good to send anyone to eternal damnation," Kwong said.