

# Philosophy of Religious Education Renaissance Module

## Online/Hybrid LEADER'S GUIDE



UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST  
ASSOCIATION

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## **Introduction**

## **Rationale**

Unitarian Universalist religious education needs to be reinvented afresh for every era. This workshop is based on the belief that we need to re-examine the philosophies that served us well in the past and incorporate new research and new philosophies of religious education that expand and deepen our understanding. A changing world affects us all, especially our children and youth. New theories of human development suggest that there may be new ways of meeting spiritual, ethical, and educational needs.

Religious education philosophy-making needs to be done not just by a few experts, but by everyone who participates in religious education. Each person operates on some de facto religious education philosophy. By becoming aware of it and examining it in light of others' views, we become empowered to act intentionally on our values and goals.

This workshop provides some opportunities to consider basic questions that are posed by theologians and educators. But it is just a beginning; leaders and participants are invited to return often to these basic questions, and to re-examine and re-vision individual and collective philosophies of Unitarian Universalist religious education.

## **Authors and Editors**

This module has witnessed many edits and revisions. As Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition, our philosophy of religious education is perpetually evolving. Additionally, our understandings of pedagogical efficacy continue to transform as brain science, disability justice and awareness about perspectives that society has predominantly marginalized in the telling of history further develop. It is important to acknowledge the minds and hands that have borne fruit through the development of this module at all stages: past authors and editors include Pat Kahn, CRE-M; Michelle Richards, CRE-M; and many whose names have not been recorded. This most recent edition was revised by Adena Dannouf, and Mary Lamb Shelden, Ph.D, CRE-C; with the Rev. Sarah Gettie McNeill as Developmental Editor.

## **Learning Objectives**

By taking this course, we anticipate participants will better

- Understand philosophies of education that have influenced Unitarian Universalist religious education and faith development, in dialogue, over time;
- Articulate one's own religious faith and religious education philosophy;
- Develop clarity about the purposes of lifespan religious education;

- Hone skill, comfort, and competence in developing and sharing a congregational philosophy of religious education with teachers and parents;
- Understand learning and faith development theories; and
- Express how our congregations can become more welcoming and inclusive to those of us with historically-marginalized identities.

## Readings & Resources

The resource material for this module consists of five essays from the book, *Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education* (Boston: Skinner House, 2001), four essays from the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*, the text *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.*, an article, and videos, as listed below. It is best if participants obtain the books before the module begins:

From *Essex Conversations*:

- Hoerlender, "Religion as Relationship"
- James, "Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities"
- Bowens-Wheatley, "Toward Wholeness and Liberation"
- Morriss, "Doorway to the Sacred"
- Harper, "Learning Types & Their Needs"

From *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, Sixth Edition*:

- Bray McNatt, "Our Faith"
- York, "Our Religious Education"
- Nguyen, "Our Work for Social Justice"
- Hauser, "Our Communities"

*Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.* by Bob Bates. This text is on the 2022 RE Credentialing Program Resource List and provides easy-to-digest synopses of more than 100 learning theories. (see sections on Vygotsky, Piaget).

Other

- Article: [Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development](#) or watch video: [Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory](#) (YouTube, 5:21)
- Joy Berry's "[Wrought Faith: Making Faith Happen](#)" (YouTube, 19:12 mins)
- [Gail Forsyth-Vail's RE History video](#) (36:32)
- Ramon Selove's [Neurodivergence Series recorded webinar](#) (36:42 mins)

## Leader Preparation

- Be thoroughly familiar with the content and process of this Leader's Guide.
- Review the PowerPoint slides. Since you will be using a lot less slides for the online module, you may want to create a shortened version for your ease of use. If you do so, recognize that the slide numbers in the Leader Guide will then be different.
- Email a welcoming letter to participants:

- Include the links to the Philosophy of Religious Education Renaissance Module: A Guide to the Reader and the handouts for this module.
- Tell participants they are responsible for obtaining a copy of *Essex Conversations*, the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, and *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.*, and for printing their own copies of the handouts.
- With the participants' UUA Log-in information provided on the roster, add them to the group and allow them access to the shared Google Drive folder the Renaissance Office has provided.
- Do what you need to do to feel comfortable in your role as a leader committed to delivering an intensive program, in a limited time, with attention to relationship and creativity among all participants.
- Center knowledge that there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all the time). This will be a mantra that is shared at the beginning of each session so that all participants are reminded of this reality for those of us who are marginalized and so that each session is held in that awareness.

## Online Module

This module utilizes many elements of a “flipped classroom” model with participants first learning some material on their own (through readings, reflection questions and videos) and then exploring and deepening their outside learning through activities and discussion during our online meetings. Therefore, it is **important to encourage participants to do the outside readings and to watch the videos prior to the start of the session in which they will be covered.** It is also important that they complete their online reflections after each session, before the next one begins.

## Requirements

This online **Philosophy of Religious Education** Renaissance module is a distance learning experience comprised of **six** two-hour webinars with reading and other assignments for each session. Credit will be offered for full participation in the module. Full participation includes:

- Online attendance and active participation in six two-hour sessions
- Reading and reflection to prepare for each session
- Responses to Reflection Questions on the Discussion Forum after each session and **reply to or comment upon at least one other person's post.** Note: The Discussion Forum will remain active until two weeks after the module closes.

- Submission of the [final evaluation](#) within a week of the ending of the module

## Technical Considerations

- The preferred webinar platform is [Zoom](#), which you can download.
- In order to access module materials, participants must have or create a UUA profile name on [UUA.org](#). If learners have already participated in an online module, they should use the profile name they have already created. **To register, they must provide their profile name** to be added to the group and begin the preparation required before the first session.
- Once facilitators add participants to the course group, they will be subscribed to the Discussion Forum and will receive a daily digest of all posts and comments made. To post on the forum, participants click on the post and add their comments. If they'd like to respond to a particular comment, they should look for the "reply" link below that comment (there's also a like button and other options). Be sure to encourage participants to save their comments, as these are deleted two weeks after the completion of the course.  
[More information about creating a UUA account and subscribing or unsubscribing to discussion forums](#)

# SESSION 1: THE CONGREGATION AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

## Background and Preparation

Review the resources below and the handouts before attending the webinar for this session.

The [handouts for this module](#) are online at UUA.org under Renaissance Modules Resources.

### Resource Assignments:

- “Our Faith” essay by Rosemary Bray McNatt from [The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#)
- “Our Communities” essay by Aisha Hauser from [The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#)
- “Our Religious Education” essay by Jessica York from the [Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide](#)
- “Religion as Relationship” essay by Pat Hoertdoerfer from [Essex Conversations](#)

### Handouts for Session One

- 1 Introduction to Renaissance and RE Credentialing
- 2 Preparation for Module Evaluation
- 3 Group Covenant
- 4 The Religious Education Philosophy Module
- 5 Session Topics
- 6 Religion as Relationship Diagram

### Discussion Forum

Before the first webinar, post an introduction in the [Session 1, Discussion Forum](#) and answer the question: “What is Religious Education?”.

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from each session and respond to the Reflection Questions in the [Session 1, Discussion Forum](#).

Facilitators will add webinar recordings to the shared folder (linked on the course pages) once the session is completed (see your [Leading an Online or Hybrid Module Guide](#) for instructions).

### Session-at-a-Glance

Introduction of Participants and Schedule	10 minutes
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Overview of the Module & Creating Covenant	20 minutes
What's in a Name?	10 minutes
The Religious Community as a Learning Community	30 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes
Sacred Spaces	25 minutes
Religious Education as Relationship Building	15 minutes
Closing	5 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

## Goals

- To build a sense of community
- To gain an overview of this module
- To invite participants to be open to new experiences
- To explore the nature of religious education
- To explore the meaning of “faith” and “religion”
- To explore the difference between religious education and faith formation
- To consider the congregation as a learning community
- To evoke memories and feelings of one’s early associations with religious community

## Introduction of Participants and Schedule (10 minutes)

### Materials

Slide 2



## Description

As a way of introducing the module, say something like:

*Welcome to the Philosophy of Religious Education Module. Since each person operates on some de facto religious education philosophy which shapes their goals and objectives for our RE programs, we need to become aware of this philosophy. This module explores the idea that, along with re-examining the philosophies that served us well in the past, we need to continually incorporate new research and new philosophies of religious education that expand and deepen our understanding. A changing world affects us all, especially our children and youth. In this module, we'll explore theories of human and faith development and consider new ways of meeting spiritual, ethical, and educational needs as we help to build congregations that are learning communities.*

**(Slide 2)** Invite participants to introduce themselves in the following way: "I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ where I \_\_\_\_\_ and if you use pronouns, please share them with us." (Leaders should also introduce themselves)

When finished, share **Slide 3** and explain that at the beginning of each session, we will briefly look over the scaffolding outlines for that day's lesson:

- Learning from last session:
  - N/A
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To build a sense of community
  - To gain an overview of this module
  - To invite participants to be open to new experiences
  - To explore the nature of religious education
  - To explore the meaning of "faith" and "religion"
  - To explore the difference between religious education and faith formation
  - To consider the congregation as a learning community
  - To evoke memories and feelings of one's early associations with religious community
- How that relates to the next session and beyond:
  - The foundational work done in this session will carry throughout our entire course. Getting to know one another and assuring that everyone is informed about these concepts will help us continue forward with a mutual understanding.

Name that as part of our ongoing awareness about inequities in how we all move through the world, we will be stating at the beginning of every session the reminder that there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that all participants are reminded of this reality for those of us who are marginalized and so that we hold each session in that awareness.

## Overview of the Module (20 minutes)

## Materials

- Handout 1 Introduction to Renaissance and RE Credentialing
- Handout 2 Preparation for Module Evaluation
- Handout 3 Group Covenant
- Handout 4 The Religious Education Philosophy Module
- Handout 5 Session Topics
- Handout 6 Religion as Relationship Building (circles)

## Description

Review Handout 1, Introduction to Renaissance and RE Credentialing, and Handout 2, Preparation for Module Evaluation.

Ask:

*For whom is this the first module?*

*Who has taken five modules?*

*For whom will this be the fifth module?*

*Who has taken all currently available modules?*

## Ask participants to look at Handout 3 Creating Covenant

### Materials

- Handout 3 Creating Covenant
- [“The 8 Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion”](#) from Visions

### Preparation

- Practice taking and copying a screenshot of the entire Zoom window into an email.

## Activity Description

Refer everyone to **Handout 3 Creating Covenant**. Say something like:

*Some congregations use the same covenant for all small group work, others create new covenants for each group, and yet others do not use covenants for small groups and make an assumption that we will all work together well. "More recent inputs on covenanting shows that the normative majority, who are often white, cis-gendered, etc., tend to make covenants that reflect the white normative culture rather than brave communal space. Some people with less privileged identities report "going along/acquiescing" to these covenants and more importantly, leaving a group rather than engaging in a covenantal issue.*

*We will begin our covenant process with the [“The 8 Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion”](#) from VISIONS, Inc., one of the organizations that assisted the UUA Commission on Institutional Change. It is also found on **Handout 3 Creating Covenant**. We can agree to these guidelines or amend them. We can “try on” these guidelines rather than engaging in a long process of reworking them. (Adapted from the Study Guide for Widening the Circle of Concern.)*

Record and display the agreed-upon guidelines and share with the group via the **shared Google Drive Folder**. Before moving to the next topic, if everyone has agreed, ask everyone to smile so a Zoom photo can be taken!

Ask participants to take out **Handout 4**, The Religious Education Philosophy Module, and go through it together.

Finally, explain that for this online Philosophy of Religious Education module, it is important to do all reading and assignments prior to the start of the session in which it will be covered. Our time together is limited and we would like to spend it engaging in activities and discussion around many topics instead of providing just an information dump. Attending the sessions ready to do the work after having completed the assignments in advance will allow you to gain the most out of this module. You can find details over what you will need to do in advance on the website page for each session under the Background and Preparation section for each session.

## What's In a Name? (10 minutes)

### Materials

- Participants' responses to the online forum question: What is Religious Education?

### Preparation

- Read through participants' responses to "What is Religious Education" on the forum prior to the session and reply or comment on some answers. Be ready to refer to some people's responses to that question (positive, affirming notions you can lift up, not criticisms).

### Description

Introduce this activity by saying:

*The name of this Renaissance Module is Philosophy of Religious Education, but the term "religious education" means different things to different people. (Reflect on some of the participants' responses to "What is Religious Education?" that they posted to the online forum.)*

*For more than a decade now, Unitarian Universalists have been examining their programs and going through a process of renaming them because of changing philosophies about congregations as learning communities. Instead of referring to it as religious education, many congregations use terms like "faith development" or "faith formation." Even the Unitarian Universalist Association has changed the name of the department which oversees the religious education*

*credentialing program and all things “RE” to the Lifespan Faith Engagement Office.*

Then read this passage from the Introduction of Betty Middleton’s book, *To Touch Inward Springs*:

*We have all grown accustomed to the term “R.E.” being used almost universally among us for “religious education,” and often really meaning, “the children’s program of the church.” I use the term “religious education” to mean programs designed for teaching and learning faith development, for any and all ages, but not to mean faith development itself. Sometimes I use “religious growth and learning programs” to mean the same thing as religious education.*

She also explains:

*Pedagogy is the various teaching approaches, methods and learning activities appropriate and effective for faith development in persons of all ages. By faith development, I mean a person’s growing and evolving engagement with and commitment to life, a person’s relationship with self, others and the universe.*

Remind participants that in Jessica York’s essay, “Our Religious Education” from the Unitarian Universalist Guide, she says **the ultimate goal of religious education is transformation.**

Read this passage from Jessica York’s essay, “Our Religious Education” from the UU Pocket Guide:

*“As Unitarian Universalists, we realize that we are imperfect beings. Always we can do better: be more empathetic; show up more often for justice, care for the sick, the lonely, the brokenhearted; and create more love in the world. We are a long way from creating that heaven on earth we all desire. How do we get to that place? If there were easy answers, we would be there already ...”*

*“Religious education is a tool for deepening and widening our faith development ... it provides dedicated time to find ways to distinguish the values that are the foundation of your life and how you can live them more fully ... it provides a brave space for the questions you need to ask, both big and small ... religious education programs bring people together to support each other in the work of making meaning of their lives.”*

Then ask:

- *So what’s in a name, and why does it matter what we call this ministry?*
- *How does what we call this ministry reveal our collective philosophy toward learning, growth, spirituality and faith development?*
- *Are there people in your congregation who would reject the notion of faith formation?*

- *If so, are they the parents in your program or the elders of the congregation? Or both?*

Conclude with these words:

*When we reframe religious education as “religious growth and learning,” or “teaching and learning for faith development,” we are more likely to develop programs that not only keep the mystery and wonder of the young child alive, we can begin thinking about lifespan faith formation when the religious community becomes a learning community.*

## **The Religious Community as Learning Community** **(30 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 5, Explicit/Implicit/Null

### **Description**

Introduce this activity by reading this excerpt from *The Church as Learning Community* by Christian author and religious educator, Dr. Norma Cook Everist:

*How differently would we set about our task if we believed that everyone in the faith community is already a teacher and a learner? In a culture that nearly worships Individualism, people still hunger for values and communities of meaning. Religious educators grow frustrated that people seem to be looking everywhere but to the church for identity, continuity, and challenge. ... The faith community’s curriculum is much more than material on paper to be read and recited; it embraces all of the people in this time and context as well as people in God’s global and historic community. People need to understand one another and one another’s faith ... to broaden our concept of the church as a learning community will challenge us, but need not overwhelm us.*

Divide the participants into breakout rooms for 10 minutes to discuss:

*Do we view our congregations as learning communities? Why or why not?*

*What happens when our philosophy affirms that all in the community are both teachers and learners?*

*How will broadening our concept of the church as a learning community challenge us?*

Allow small group discussions for ten minutes. Then bring everyone back and ask if anyone has any comments, reflections or ideas they want to share with the whole group.

Explain that Angus MacLean wrote “The Method is the Message” in 1951, yet it is still so relevant today. He said:

*I place method in the heart of our curriculum because methods determine so largely the human relations that prevail in our work with children ... I place method at the heart of our work because the methods of address to life and people are at the heart of our liberal faith.*

Then ask:

*How do the methods used by our congregations’ religious education programs reveal its philosophy?*

*If the program is “for the children and youth,” how are adults invited into the community of learning?*

Finally, bring up religious educator and author Maria Harris’ view that the entire congregation is the curriculum. (Note: this is also in the Curriculum Renaissance Module.) However, let’s go beyond that term, as curriculum is a vehicle from which an experience is generated. Instead, perhaps religious education and faith formation is all that we do in a congregation (per Connie Goodbread). No matter what we call it, we are teaching our children, youth and adults outside of their scheduled “R.E.” time through the messages we send, our actions, and the words we use.

### Display **Slide 5, Explicit, Implicit & Null**

Maria Harris uses the terms: **Explicit, Implicit and Null** to explore the messages we send and the lessons we teach, often without being aware of it. For example:

Explicit = We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people

Implicit = But not children, because they are not allowed to help themselves to food during coffee hour

Null = Children are not people

**Send participants to breakout rooms for 10 minutes** and ask the participants what they think of this idea, and how they see the Explicit, Implicit and Null messages that are being sent, not only to the children or youth & their parents, but other adults in the congregation. After ten minutes have passed, bring everyone back from the breakout rooms to report any interesting learnings they had from the conversation.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **Sacred Spaces (25 minutes)**

#### **Materials**

- Meditation on Sacred Spaces

#### **Description**

Remind the group that many Unitarian Universalists come to our faith community from other religions, and often there are several stops along the path into Unitarian Universalism. Note also that many people (quite possibly including some participants in this module) come to our congregations “unchurched,” that is, they were not raised in any religious tradition or community. And there are a number of “birthright” UUs, those raised in the faith. Take a quick poll by show of hands to see which categories are represented in the group.

Then say something like:

*Our experiences in other religious situations—whether or not those experiences took place in an organized religious setting—are carried with us into our identity as Unitarian Universalists. Many of us move into our current identities and communities with ease; others move through the experience feeling angry, or estranged from family, or marginalized from the center of their culture. To be fully present in our religious community, we need to understand our memories and acknowledge our religious past. I would like to invite you on a guided meditation to explore your imaginations and to bring us some tools to establish connections and bridges between past and present and possibly the future.*

All are invited to participate in this meditation as their spirits and bodies allow. If the exercise feels awkward, please stick with it. However, if you find at any point that you do not feel safe or notice you are being triggered doing this meditation, you can do what you need to care for yourself. You can just listen or color or move away for a few minutes.

Invite participants to find a relaxed position and offer them the choice of turning off their video cameras, thereby allowing time for people to explore their imaginations in private.

Lead participants through the following guided meditation (adapted from the *Haunting Church* curriculum):

*Please find a comfortable position...  
Take a few deep breaths... Relax...  
Now move back in time to a place where you felt the sacred...  
A place where you had a religious or spiritual experience...  
A place where you felt the presence of the "other"...  
or a oneness with all creation.  
It might be a church... it might be outdoors... it might be anywhere...  
In your mind's eye, imagine the neighborhood, the location in which you find  
yourself... Approach it slowly...  
Move around it and let its presence impress itself upon you...  
If you are thinking of a building, imagine moving around the outside...  
If it is not a building, imagine moving toward the place, experiencing it from  
outside... What is there?... Are there flowers? Trees?...  
Are there sidewalks? Signs? What do they say?  
Is there more than one way to enter this place?...  
Choose the one you feel most comfortable with and enter.*

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

*You have time to move around this place... As you do, be aware of all of your  
senses... What do you experience?  
What do you see in your mind's eye? Perhaps you become aware of senses you  
don't normally think of like sound, smell, or taste. How does your body feel in this  
space?  
If this is a place where people gather, where do they gather?  
Are you there, or are you experiencing it from outside?  
Do you have a favorite place?  
Are there places here where you are not allowed, that are off limits? Can you go  
there now?  
Take time to rest in this place...  
Where are your senses drawn? What do you experience?  
Go to the place you feel most at ease.*

[Pause for 30 seconds.]

*Are there people there? If so, who are they?... Visit with them...  
How are you feeling about being with them?*

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

*After your visit, say goodbye...take it in one last time...and slowly leave this  
place.  
When you are ready, return to this room...  
into this present time and this circle of friends.*



[Pause.]

*When you are ready, bring your awareness back to our learning community.*

Let the participants know that when they are feeling ready they may return to the group, turn their video cameras back on and join us. Allow a few minutes for people to regroup, then ask for a brief moment of quiet reflection on the meditation:

*Where were your sacred spaces?  
Are these similar or different from the sacred spaces we try to create for our children, youth & adults? Why or why not?*

Then say:

*How can we create positive memories for the children and youth in our congregations? Let's take some time to consider this through small group discussions.*

Divide participants into breakout rooms for the following task (10 mins):

*Your task is to imagine the children and youth at your current congregation are grown, it is 30 years later and they are doing the Sacred Spaces meditation. What would you like them to take away, to have memories of as they think back to their church home? As you do so, think about the issues raised by Jessica York and Aisha Hauser in their essays on community and religious education.*

Allow ten minutes for conversation in the breakout rooms. Remind participants when they have 2 minutes left before the breakout rooms close. Once breakout rooms are closed, take a few minutes to ask for reflections or comments which were meaningful in their small group discussion.

## **Religious Education as Relationship Building (15 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 6 Religion as Relationship Building
- Handout 6 Religion as Relationship Building
- "Religion as Relationship," essay by Pat Hoerdoerfer in Essex Conversations

### **Description**

Introduce this activity by reading this portion of the essay:

*Religion is our quest for meaning and our ultimate commitment. By nature religion is relational. Our religious imperative is to live with ourselves, with others, and with our earth. These are the three inescapable relationships: psychological (self), social (others) and natural (planet earth) ... Growing into relationships is essential to becoming a person. We all exist within a vast interacting web of relationships and we are shaped by them. As we grow we become aware of their enormous variety and complexity. We begin with these qualities and experiences in the process of becoming a self. We start with our own bodies. Then we move on to experiences with other people, building relationships with [caregivers], siblings, extended family members, friends, acquaintances.*

Sum up by saying:

*In "Religion as Relationship," Pat Hoerdoerfer promotes a model of religious education using the image of a spiral of dynamic, interacting, interconnecting relationships.*

**Display Slide 6.** Invite participants to think of a child, youth or adult within their congregation and take some time to fill out the relationship spiral that is Handout 6.

Remind the participants when they have only 2 minutes left. Allow them up to 10 minutes to complete the spiral (keep watch of their actions to judge how much time is still needed by who appears to still be working and who needs more time).

After participants have completed their spirals (or ten minutes has passed), invite those who would like to share their spirals to do so. Then ask:

*How difficult was this activity, trying to imagine those relationships spiraling out?*

*How are relationships built in our congregations among the generations?*

*How is multigenerational community built and why is it taking us so long to do it effectively?*

Close by saying:

*According to a study by the Christian group LifeWay Research, "teens who had five or more adults from the church invest in them during the ages of 15 to 18 were less likely to leave the church after high school." That's a powerful statement of how important relationship building is and how it needs to be integral to our philosophies of religious education.*

Then ask:

*What challenges would we need to address to truly educate for religious education as relationship building in our congregations?*

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

## Materials

- Closing reading

## Description

Remind participants to share reflections in the online forum, answering the reflection questions designed to follow session one and responding to the post of at least one peer.

Remind participants to do the reading and other assignments prior to the next session.

Then offer closing words from the last chapter of Betty Jo Middleton's book: *To Touch Inward Springs*:

*As we seek to become more truly educating communities, instead of dividing the church into worship, education, music, service and social action components, perhaps we may think of ways in which we can provide all of these experiences to people of all ages ... We live in a time of change and uncertainty. We must be courageous and creative to meet the needs of the times ahead. We are called to new beginnings even as we honor what has gone before, that we may be worthy of the heritage we have been given. It is our privilege and responsibility to contribute to this heritage of hope and faith and love for children, and for tomorrow's.*

# SESSION 2—LEARNING THEORIES & FAITH DEVELOPMENT

## Background and Preparation

### Resource Assignments:

- Daniel Harper’s essay, “Learning Types & Their Needs” from *Essex Conversations*
- Article: [Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development](#) or watch video: [Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory \(YouTube, 5:21\)](#)
- Joy Berry’s video presentation, [“Wrought Faith: Making Faith Happen”](#) (YouTube, 19 mins)
- *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.* by Bob Bates, pp 48-51. This text is on the 2022 RE Credentialing Program Resource List and provides easy-to-digest synopses of more than 100 learning theories. (see sections on Vygotsky, Piaget, pp 48-51) It is not required for this module, but if participants are in the credentialing program and they already have this text, it can further scaffold their learning.

Plus read the following handouts:

- Handout 7 Constructivist Learning Theories
- Handout 8 Faith Stages According to Fowler
- Handout 9 Criticisms of Fowler’s Theory
- Handout 10 Other Perspectives on Developmental Stages
- Handout 11 Wrought Faith: Minding What We’ve Missed in Faith Development

### **Discussion Forum**

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from the session and post a response to the Reflections Questions in the [Session 2, Discussion Forum](#).

### **Webinar Information**

Date:

Time:

Webinar recordings will be added to the shared folder once completed.

### **Session-at-a-Glance**

Opening	10 minutes
Constructivist Learning Theories	20 minutes

Creating Learning Experiences	25 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes
Faith: I Believe, I Feel, I Act	15 minutes
Fowler's Faith Development Theory	20 minutes
Complicating Fowler: Berry, Hurd, Derman-Sparks	20 minutes
Closing	5 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

## Goals

- To continue group building
- To continue inviting participants to be open to new experiences
- To continue exploring the nature of religious education
- To continue exploring the meaning of "faith" and "religion"
- To understand and critique Fowler's stages of faith development
- To explore developmental theories and their relevance to religious education

## Opening (10 minutes)

### Materials:

Opening Reading by Confucius  
Slide 7

### Preparation

- None

### Description

Share this opening reading by Confucius:

*By three methods we may learn wisdom:  
First, by reflection, which is noblest;  
Second, by imitation, which is easiest;  
And third by experience, which is the bitterest.*

Then **display Slide 7** and review the scaffolding for this lesson:

- Learning from last session:
  - To build a sense of community
  - To gain an overview of this module
  - To invite participants to be open to new experiences
  - To explore the nature of religious education
  - To explore the meaning of “faith” and “religion”
  - To explore the difference between religious education and faith formation
  - To consider the congregation as a learning community
  - To evoke memories and feelings of one’s early associations with religious community
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To continue group building
  - To continue inviting participants to be open to new experiences
  - To continue exploring the nature of religious education
  - To continue exploring the meaning of “faith” and “religion”
  - To understand and evaluate Fowler’s stages of faith development
  - To explore developmental theories and their relevance to religious education
- How that relates to the next session and beyond:
  - Gaining an understanding of developmental theory will offer a foundation for what we’ll be learning next about historical philosophers and perspectives in religious education

*And our reminder, there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that we hold our learning together in that awareness.*

## **Constructivist Learning Theories (20 minutes)**

### **Materials:**

- Slides 8-13: Constructivist Approaches to Learning
- Handout 7 Constructivist Learning Theories

### **Preparation**

- Familiarize yourself with the learning theories presented in this session
- Familiarize yourself with the limitations and criticisms of Piaget’s, Vygotsky’s, and Fischer’s theories

## **Description**

Introduce the session by saying something like:

*Today we will be exploring different theories of learning and how they impact our work as religious educators. Many of you have backgrounds in education, and even if you do not, you are probably familiar with the theory of Pavlovian conditioning. While this can be an effective technique for many learning environments, constructivist learning theories reject the idea that learning is simply the behavioral response to stimuli.*

### **Display Slide 8: Constructivist Learning Theories**

Explain:

*Constructivist Learning Theories emphasize that children learn about the world by acting within their environment and are active participants in their learning. Two major Constructivist theorists are Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Their common goals were to explore cognitive development defined as thinking leading to rational thought, making mental representations in the brain, and eventually leading to abstract and logical reasoning.*

### **Display Slide 9: Piaget vs. Vygotsky**

*However, whereas Piaget focused primarily upon internal influences, Vygotsky emphasized the external forces which shape cognition, seeing it as more of a collaborative process that is both social and psychological. Piaget believed that social interaction and language are primarily mechanisms for disrupting equilibrium which are then reestablished when children individually reconstruct their understanding and advance their thinking.*

*Vygotsky's theory is continuous and lifelong, whereas Piaget's theory is based upon a child progressing through a series of distinct stages and implies that cognitive development ends with adolescence. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory stresses the importance of language to establish social relationships conducive for learning. His Zone of Proximal Development and the presence of a More Knowledgeable Other in modeling and helping with scaffolding leads to cognitive development within a cultural context. Because Vygotsky's theory emphasizes cultural influences, his constructivist view is not universal in that some children will develop social or motor skills at different rates depending upon the values of their culture. For example, in Westernized nations, independence is highly valued and so developing cognitive abilities that lead to independence are considered more important than in countries which place a high value on interdependence.*

### **Display Slide 10: Limitations of Piaget's theory**

Explain:

*Piaget's theory of cognitive development is primarily criticized because of his research methods. Piaget's observations of his own three children served as the bulk of his*

*research. When using children other than his own for research and experiments, Piaget's small research samples were all taken from children of well-educated professionals of high socioeconomic status. Because of this unrepresentative sample, it is difficult to generalize his findings to a larger population.*

*Another criticism of Piaget's theory is the idea of having to complete a stage before moving on to the next one. The idea of stages as an approach to learning theories is not supported by brain research and has fallen out of favor with most learning theorists. Even Piaget himself believed that development does not always follow such a linear and predictable path.*

*Finally, Piaget's theories underestimate the abilities of children. Modern research has proven that children possess many of the abilities at an earlier age than mapped out by Piaget's theories. For example, children are far less egocentric than he believed, as they have some ability to take the perspective of others as young as 3 years old.*

Ask participants to consider whether the pedagogical approaches in their religious education programs better resemble Piaget's or Vygotsky's theories and why. Invite them to take out a piece of paper or open a Word document, make two columns and list the aspects of their religious education programs which more closely resemble Piaget or Vygotsky's theories. (Allow participants 10 minutes for this activity.)

When time is up, inform participants that we will return to this idea of the different aspects of our religious education programs and their pedagogical approaches, but first we will examine another constructivist approach to learning, Fischer's Skill Theory.

### **Display Slide 11: Fischer's Skill Theory**

Then explain:

*Kurt Fischer's Skill Theory builds upon Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development in that his view includes a series of skills to be mastered. His theory includes additional levels to represent cognitive development which happens throughout life as opposed to Piaget's stage theory which assumes cognitive development ends with adolescence. His dynamic skill scale involves not stages but restructurings of thought. As people move along this scale, their thinking becomes increasingly abstract, complex, and integrated.*

*According to this theory, learning and development involve the whole brain, cognition develops through levels and tiers, context matters, learning is slow and variable, and support is essential.*

### **Display Slide 12: Fischer's Skill Theory (cont.)**

Explain:

*People learn best when in a rich environment that engages learners emotionally, motivationally, kinesthetically, and reflectively.*

*As opposed to most cognitive development models, Fischer's levels are used to establish a child's skills, not the child's overall developmental level. Since most children*



*will be at different levels for different skills, in order to characterize a particular child's cognitive development, a cognitive profile is required.*

**Display Slide 13:** Fischer's Skill Theory (cont.)

*Development is not like climbing a ladder where each step leads to the development of a particular set of skills. Instead, he likens cognitive development to a spider's web, with growth and change happening along many pathways at the same time.*

**Divide participants into breakout rooms for 10 minutes to discuss in small groups (place questions in the chat):**

- *If these theories of learning are not part of your current pedagogical approach to religious education, how could some programs be adapted?*
- *What can we take away from these constructivist theories and their application to our religious education programs, including selection of curricula?*
- *What do these theories tell us about the importance and role of the volunteer teacher in our religious education programs?*

Allow small group discussions to continue for ten minutes. Remind participants when they have two minutes left. Close the breakout rooms and ask for any brief reflections or interesting observations participants would like to share about the comments made in their small groups.

## **Creating Learning Experiences (25 minutes)**

**Materials:**

- None

**Preparation:**

- None

**Description:**

Introduce this activity by saying something like:

*We've explored a number of different learning theories relevant for developing a comprehensive approach to religious education pedagogy. Now we will break into small groups and your task will be to create a multigenerational learning opportunity for members of a fictional congregation. As you create this learning opportunity, reflect on your pedagogical approach and how it is based upon one or more of the learning theories we explored in this unit. Your small group will have fifteen minutes to come up with a presentation, and each group will have a few minutes to present and then address questions from participants in the other groups. Make sure your group identifies the learning theory/ies that this program utilizes.*

Then Ask:

*Does anyone have any clarifying questions as to the assignment before we begin the process?*

**Divide participants into three breakout rooms to create their multigenerational programs.** Allow 15 minutes for this activity. Remind participants when they have only 2 minutes left until the breakout rooms close.

Have each of the three groups present their program and explain how it utilizes one or more of the learning theories we explored in this unit. After each presentation, invite comments and reflections from the rest of the participants before moving onto the next group's presentation. Present your own observations and evaluation of the groups' work after the other participants have had a chance to share theirs.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **Faith: I Believe, I Feel, I Act (15 minutes)**

#### **Materials**

- Slide 14, I Believe, I Feel, I Act

#### **Preparation**

- Set up a Zoom poll you will deploy a few minutes into this section.
  - Title: Comfort with "Faith"
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Question: "How comfortable are you using the word "faith" to speak of your religion or religious experience?"
  - Multiple Choice answers: very comfortable, mostly comfortable, neutral, uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, I don't believe it applies to liberal religion

#### **Description**

Introduce this section by saying:

*We've examined a number of learning theories, and now we turn to learning for faith development. To do this we need to explore the meaning of the word "faith." At the same time, "faith" is a word that some Unitarian Universalists find difficult to use or define in terms of liberal religion.*

**Start your Zoom poll** and after all have participated, review the results.

Discuss the fact that there are many different definitions of faith. Then say:

*For our purposes here, I suggest that we might consider faith as having more than one dimension. I'd like for us to think of faith in three senses: a world view, a loyalty of one's heart, and a way of life.*

*Looking at it this way, faith development can occur among people who profess creeds and those who abhor them, in people who think of themselves as religious and those who see themselves as areligious. Faith can be defined in a threefold way: as "belief"—the cognitive (the best conclusions of our minds), as "feeling"—the affective (those allegiances of our hearts), or as "act"—the behavioral (those things we are willing to put our lives on the line for). This threefold definition of faith—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—will form the framework of our next learning activity.*

Explain that participants will now have the opportunity to explore the dimensions of their faith in the three ways mentioned. **Display Slide 14**, and ask participants to draw the three columns on a piece of paper or in a Word document:

I BELIEVE (world view)      I FEEL (loyalty of my heart)      I ACT (way of life)

Invite them to consider their faith in these terms. An example might be:

I believe the earth is a source of life.

I feel appreciation and gratitude for the gifts from our planet earth.

I act on my values and beliefs by planting seeds to nurture and to honor the earth.

Explain that they can make as many statements as they have time for now and they can always continue in the days and months ahead. Before time wraps up, invite participants to share some samples of their faith statements.

## **Fowler's Faith Development Theory (20 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 15 Lifespan Perspective of Human Development
- Slide 16 Fowler's Faith Development Theory
- Slide 17 Strengths & Weaknesses of Fowler's Theory
  
- Handout 8 Faith Stages According to Fowler
- Handout 9 Criticisms of Fowler's Theory

### **Preparation**

- Familiarize yourself with Fowler's Faith Development Stages and the criticisms of his theory so that you have enough comfort with the talking points below.

## Description

Introduce this activity by saying:

*When we are visioning religious education programs, it is important to consider what is known or theorized about human development, so that the educational experiences we plan are appropriate to the seasons of life and the nature of growth.*

*The idea that humans develop slowly to maturity is an ancient one. However, the science of human growth is a relatively new one and is constantly evolving. In the last 100 years, different schools of research and theory have attempted to answer the question: “When are we to do what?”*

*Psychologists interested in the development of faith throughout an individual’s lifespan have proposed various frameworks for understanding how our perceptions of the religious—a broad category, including meaning, morality, and relatedness—change as our lives unfold. The framework many UU religious educators use is the one offered by James Fowler.*

*But a note of caution: theories can be helpful in understanding general patterns or trends of development, but they do not provide absolute typologies or truths that apply to everyone.*

### **Display Slide 15:** Lifespan Perspective of Human Development

*Remember, modern researchers believe that rather than completing a series of stages, lifespan development is lifelong, multidimensional and multidirectional, highly plastic and influenced by multiple, interacting forces. So while Fowler’s theories offer a guide for faith development needs in terms of helping us understand some of the complexity, we need to recognize some of its limitations as well.*

### **Display Slide 16:** Fowler’s Faith Development Theory

*Let’s look at the descriptions of Fowler’s stages of faith by the Rev. Lindsay Bates and the religious educator Cynthia Wade in your handouts, number 8.*

Provide a brief presentation to the group on James Fowler’s stages of faith development theory based on Handout 8, Faith Stages According to Fowler, and your own knowledge of faith development.

There may be participants in the group very familiar with Fowler and other faith development theories. Do not lecture if you can engage others in a discussion. You may want your co-leader and/or an especially knowledgeable participant to speak with another voice about Fowler’s faith development theory.

### **Display Slide 17:** Fowler’s Faith Development Theory Strengths & Weaknesses

Highlight some of the following points in your dialogue:

- Fowler draws a distinction between faith and belief.
- While beliefs may divide, faith unites.

- Fowler’s Stages of Faith are cumulative (in that one brings to each new crisis/disequilibrium the mixed residue of past solutions and contains in it an anticipation of the issues of crisis/disequilibrium in future stages) and conflict is the dynamic force that drives developmental advance.
- Fowler’s Stages in faith development are hierarchical, sequential, and invariant
- One of the greatest strengths of Fowler’s theory is its inclusiveness. By focusing on the process rather than the content of faith development, Fowler sidesteps some divisive theological issues. His relational definition of faith in terms of “shared centers of value and power” includes both theistic and non-theistic understandings of ultimacy (Stages of Faith). The ultimate goal of faith development—the growth process of wrestling meaning from life, testing it through action, and subjecting it again (and again) to the scrutiny of our minds, hearts, and actions—is compatible with Unitarian Universalist perspectives.
- Some limitations and weaknesses of Fowler’s theory are the shortcomings in the ethnic composition, religious and denominational tradition, and categories (faith-stage labels) of interviewees. Refer learners to Handout 13: Criticisms of Fowler’s Theory.

Invite questions and comments from participants. It is important to note that human development, cognitive growth, faith development, religious identity, and moral development are complex and contextual theories and concepts. These theories and concepts speak directly to religious education and our congregations as learning communities. Note that this information is also included in the UU Identity module because of the implications for faith development; being exposed to Fowler and other faith development theories multiple times is valuable because you can take away more understanding each time. Encourage participants to check resources in the bibliography for further reading and study.

## Faith Development Group Portraits (20 minutes)

### Materials

- Slide 18, Faith Development Group Portraits

### Description

**Display Slide 18** as you explain this activity. You will be assigning participants to a breakout room and a learning group. The numbers in the groups may be uneven, but each group should have at least three members. Each group will work with one age/developmental level: preschool, elementary, adolescent, emerging adult, adult, and elder. Invite participants to create a faith development portrait of the age chosen using pictures, words, phrases, and symbols. Remind them to focus on learning theories

about faith development, and only secondarily consider mental, physical, emotional, and social characteristics for that age group. Finally, ask them what knowing these characteristics means for shaping religious education in their own congregation – ask them to list three or four adjustments they might make to their own programs based on this information.

Allow 10 minutes for small groups to work on their portraits in breakout rooms.

Highlight these resources:

- Handout 8 Faith Stages According to Fowler
- Handout 10 Other Perspectives on Developmental Stages
- Handout 11 Wrought Faith: Minding What We've Missed in Faith Development

Let participants know when they have five minutes left in their breakout rooms for this task.

Once you have brought the participants back from the breakout rooms, invite each group to share their portrait and its implications for faith development in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Leaders and participants may wish to add characteristics that were missing. Invite further comments from the whole group about the implications of faith development and human development theories for UU congregations. Consider asking participants to upload any documents created to the shared folder.

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Closing Words

### **Description**

Remind participants to post in the online forum for session two as well as to do the reading and other assignments prior to the next session. Mention that next week we will begin an examination of our historical and theological traditions and how religious education in the past impacts what we do with our religious education philosophies today.

Close with this reading from Sonia Ricotti:

“Surrender to what is.  
Let go of what was.  
Have faith in what will be.”

# SESSION 3: OUR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PHILOSOPHIES OF THE PAST

## Background and Preparation

### Resource Assignments

Review the following:

- Handout 12 Dewey and Progressive Education
- Handout 13 Fahs and MacLean
- Handout 15 John Westerhoff: Modes/Dimensions of Consciousness
- [Gail Forsyth-Vail's RE History video](#) (36:32 mins)
- *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.* by Bob Bates, pp 276-278

### Discussion Forum

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from the session and post a response to the Reflections Questions in the **Session 3, Discussion Forum** thread.

### Webinar Information

Date:

Time:

Webinar recordings will be added to the shared folder once completed.

### Session-at-a-Glance

Opening	10 minutes
Who Influences Religious Education Philosophy?	20 minutes
Roots of Liberal Religious Education	25 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes
Unitarian Universalist Forebears	30 minutes
Head & Heart (John Westerhoff)	25 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

## Goals

- To continue group building
- To articulate one’s own philosophy of religious education
- To gain a basic historical perspective on liberal religious education
- To understand the Unitarian Universalist legacy in religious education

## Opening (10 minutes)

### Materials

- Opening reading
- Slide 19

### Description

Begin with this quote from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century African American Unitarian and AME Abolitionist, suffragist poet, lecturer, and author, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper:

It does not seem to me that money is our greatest want. Neither do I think that possession of intelligence and talent is our greatest want. Our greatest wants strike deeper than gold or knowledge can supply. We want more soul, a higher cultivation of all spiritual faculties. We need more unselfishness, earnestness, and integrity. . . The important lesson we should learn, and should be able to teach, is how to make every gift, whether gold or talent, fortune or genius, subserve the cause of crushed humanity and carry out the greatest cause of the present age, the glorious idea of human brotherhood. (1859)

Then **display Slide 19** and review the scaffolding for this lesson:

- Learning from last session:
  - To continue group building
  - To continue inviting participants to be open to new experiences
  - To continue exploring the nature of religious education
  - To continue exploring the meaning of “faith” and “religion”
  - To understand and critique Fowler’s stages of faith development
  - To explore developmental theories and their relevance to religious education
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To continue group building
  - To articulate one’s own philosophy of religious education
  - To gain a basic historical perspective on liberal religious education



- To understand the Unitarian Universalist legacy in religious education
- How that relates to the next session and beyond:
  - Understanding the historical perspective on liberal religious education will help in understanding which voices are missing and how to incorporate that into our own religious education philosophies

*And our reminder, there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that we hold our learning together in that awareness.*

## Who Influences Religious Education Philosophy? (20 minutes)

### Materials

- None

### Description

Start by brainstorming:

*Who influences religious education philosophy?*

Participants may call out historical figures, affirm these answers, but then ask participants to think about their congregations.

*Who influences religious education philosophy in our congregations?*

Include some of the following points in a brief discussion:

At the very least, the “who influences” religious education philosophy includes:

- the children and youth
- the parents
- the teachers and leaders
- the minister or director of religious education
- the parish minister

The “who” includes all of the people of the congregation.

The “who” includes religious educators, both historical and contemporary.

**Display Slide 20**, Relationships Crucial to Fostering Faith Development

Then say:

As we think about these responses to “who influences religious education philosophy,” we know that the *relationship* among these people will be crucial to fostering religious growth.

- The role of the teachers and leaders must be in harmony with the goals of the program.
- The relationship of the children and youth with the teachers and leaders must be one that fosters the kinds of growth we wish to encourage.
- The parents must be included in the educational venture, for they are the primary religious educators of their children and youth.
- The professional and lay leaders of the congregation need to be supportive of parents’ educational ministry to children, youth, and adults.

**Display Slide 21** as you introduce the next task for small group discussion.

Divide participants into breakout rooms for 10 minutes to discuss:

- *How do we include parents in the educational venture of their children?*
- *In what ways can our congregations encourage teachers and parents to engage and deepen their own spiritual search?*
- *How is your program nurturing and affirming parents in their role as primary religious educators?*
- *How do we get support from other professional staff and leaders of the congregation to be supportive of the parent’s role as primary religious educator?*

Allow discussion in breakout rooms to continue for 10 minutes. Remind participants when they have two minutes before the breakout rooms close. After everyone has returned from the breakout rooms, invite reflection or comments on something said in their small group discussion.

## Roots of Liberal Religious Education (25 minutes)

### Materials

- Slide 22 William Ellery Channing
- Slide 23 John Dewey
- Handout 12 Dewey and Progressive Education
- Handout 14 The Great End in Religious Instruction
- *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.* by Bob Bates, pp 276-278 (optional)

### Description

Introduce this section by saying:

*In order to understand where we are in religious education today, we need to know where we have come from, for we are part of a movement with roots reaching*

*back nearly three centuries. In this section we will look at a few of the forebears of liberal religious education, not all of them Unitarians or Universalists, as well as the historical context in which liberal religious education grew.*

*We acknowledge that this history is largely a history of white men. Our history has been shaped by White Supremacy Culture and the history that is told is that of the people who had influence at the time. Surely, there are many individuals and stories that society disregarded in recognizing social influence. Yet, William Ellery Channing is one individual who had lasting influence in the 18th and 19th centuries.*

To give participants a historical reference, **share Slide 22** about William Ellery Channing (1780-1842). Share some of the following information about Channing:

- He was a leader of liberal Christianity, largely responsible for adoption of the name “Unitarian” by the liberals.
- His guiding principle was faith—faith in the child, in God, in scriptures.
- His religious education methodology was to get the attention of children, which means you must love them and teach by questioning.
- His fear was that Sunday schools would become mechanical teaching vehicles and pass on religion as a “lifeless tradition and not as a quickening reality.”
- His address to the Unitarian Sunday School Society in 1838 lifted up a very different view of religious education from that of the Bible-based Sunday schools.

#### **Invite participants to take out Handout 14.**

Engage the group in a responsive reading excerpted from *The Sunday School: A Discourse Pronounced before the Sunday School Society*, Boston, 1838 (also Reading 652 in *Singing the Living Tradition*) by asking for volunteers to read the passages in alternating fashion. Note the second line of this version has been adapted from the original to omit ableist language.

The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds on the young,  
but to stir up their own;

*Not to make them experience as we experience, but to explore inquiringly  
and steadily themselves;*

Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent  
love of truth;

*Not to form an outward regularity, but to touch inward springs;*

Not to bind them by ineradicable prejudices to our particular sect or peculiar  
notions,

*But to prepare them for impartial, conscientious judging of whatever subjects may be offered to their decision;*

Not to burden the memory, but to quicken and strengthen the power of thought;

*Not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment.*

In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul; to bring understanding, conscience, and heart into earnest, vigorous action on religious and moral truth, to excite and cherish spiritual life.

**Display Slide 23.** Introduce John Dewey by saying he was one of the great progressive educators of the 20th century and had a strong influence on UU religious educators such as Angus MacLean and Sophia Lyons Fahs. Share some of the following information:

- He emphasized experiential learning, insisting on the interrelatedness of doing and knowing, “learning by doing.”
- He articulated a need for child-centered, not creed-centered or content-centered, curricula.
- He focused on the “whole child,” including psychosocial and political aspects.
- He founded the Religious Education Association.

Refer to Handout 12, Dewey and Progressive Education, from *Educating in Faith*, by Mary Boys. Ask participants to share with the group as they are willing:

*Do you see evidence of the philosophies of Channing and Dewey in the religious education programs in your congregation today?*

*How might they have influenced Sophia Lyon Fahs & Angus MacLean in their philosophy development?*

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

## **Unitarian Universalist Forebears (30 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 24 Fahs & MacLean’s Philosophies
- Slide 25 Multimedia Kit Era & Futures Committee Era Philosophies
- Handout 13 Fahs and MacLean

## Preparation

- Review the curricula eras information before leading this activity.
- Watch Gail Forsyth-Vail's RE History video before this webinar (36 mins)  
<https://www.uua.org/re/adults/curricular-resources/uu-history-videos>

## Description

Introduce Fahs and MacLean by saying:

*We honor Sophia Lyon Fahs every year at the Fahs Lecture at General Assembly, and Angus MacLean through the MacLean Award the Lifespan Faith Engagement Office gives annually at General Assembly. But the truest way to honor them is by understanding their philosophies of religious education and by learning from them.*

Ask participants to refer to Handout 13 Fahs and MacLean, which presents "Fulfilling Channing's Challenge," by Jeanne Nieuwejaar. Using this, along with their memories of the RE history video, invite them to reflect on the following questions:

- *What were Fahs' and MacLean's philosophies of religious development?*
- *What were some of their religious education theories?*

**Display Slide 24** with questions to be considered in breakout rooms. Send participants to breakout rooms to discuss their responses to these questions and their own experiences and understanding of Fahs and MacLean:

- *What was their understanding of the nature of the child and how we nurture religious growth?*
- *What did they see as the role of experience in education?*
- *What was the goal of religious growth and learning?*

Allow conversations to continue for ten minutes. Remind participants when they have two more minutes left before the breakout rooms close. After participants have returned from the breakout rooms, ask:

- *Is there anything in their philosophies which seem outdated today?*
- *Were you surprised by some of your discoveries about them watching the RE history video?*
- *Was there anything we have not yet achieved but are still striving for?*
- *Any other interesting discoveries?*

**Display Slide 25** with questions to be considered in small group discussion in break out rooms.

Send participants to break out rooms to discuss their reflections and their own experiences and understanding of the Multimedia Kit and RE Futures Committee eras,

including whether or not they experienced any of the curricula of this era as a child, youth, or adult. Encourage them to consider the following questions in their breakout rooms:

- *How did the new emphasis upon secularism influence the creation of the curricula of the Kit era?*
- *How did the new emphasis upon UU identity in the RE Futures Era influence a huge change in Unitarian Universalist religious education philosophy?*
- *What essential parts of our religious education philosophy can you trace back to the philosophies of the Multimedia Era or Religious Education Futures Committee Era?*

Allow conversations to continue for ten minutes. Remind participants when they have two more minutes left before the breakout rooms close. After participants have returned from the breakout rooms, ask for any brief reflections or observations they had during the discussion.

## Head & Heart (25 minutes)

### Materials

- Slide 26 John Westerhoff
- Slide 27 John Westerhoff (cont.)
- Slide 28 Head & Heart activity
- Slide 29 Head & Heart activity
- Handout 15 John Westerhoff: Modes/Dimensions of Consciousness
- Handout 16 Head & Heart Activity

### Preparation

- Review the information about John Westerhoff before leading this activity.

### Description

Introduce this activity by saying:

*The question of where and when religious education happens depends somewhat on each person and how they relate to faith. For some people, faith and values form more as we think about issues, discussing and clarifying our thoughts in our head. But for some of us, values and faith are formed more experientially, by what we've encountered in life and the feelings we've developed about our experiences.*

Several of the essays in *Essex Conversations* make the latter assumption—for example, in urging the importance of multigenerational community as one of the most important loci for religious education.

With **Slide 26**, introduce John Westerhoff and give the following information:

- Prominent influence on religious education in the 1970s
- Professor at Duke University Divinity School, formerly at Harvard
- An editor of *Colloquy* and *Religious Education Magazine*
- An editor of *Religious Education*, the journal of the Religious Education Association (REA)
- Author of *Generation to Generation: Will Our Children Have Faith?*
- An exponent of religious socialization, a critic of “church school,” and an advocate of religious community

**Display Slide 27** as you point out Handout 15 John Westerhoff: Modes/Dimensions of Consciousness. Read aloud, or have participants read aloud, the selections below from Westerhoff’s “Values for Today’s Children,” from an informal address published in *Religious Education*, the REA journal, vol. 75, no. 3, May-June 1980. Westerhoff sees values and faith as being formed by socialization, with “conceptualizations of meaning and rational reflection upon experience” following later.

*The human mind organizes experiences in two different manners, or to say it another way, consciousness has two distinct modes or dimensions. One has been called a responsive-intuitive mode of thinking and the other, an active-intellectual mode of thinking. The active-intellectual mode...is characterized by reflection, order, prediction, logical analysis, control. It is nurtured by the sciences and verbal activity and expressed through signs, concepts and reflective action. The responsive-intuitive mode, on the other hand, focuses upon the affective processes and feelings, is characterized by experience, chaos, surrender, mystery, imagination and is nurtured by the arts and non-verbal activities. It is expressed through symbols, myths and rituals.*

*How we envision the ends and means of our lives frames the content of our values... We transmit, acquire and sustain our values by identification with and imitation of significant others and by participating in the drama, stories, songs, dances and visualization of a community.*

**Display Slide 28**, John Westerhoff (cont.)

*Through our participation in a community’s life and its rituals, we enact and represent a myth (true story) of how the world began, how it will end and the nature of meaningful and purposeful life in the interim. In this manner we acquire and sustain the values for which and by which we live... But we have yet to convince a significant number of people in the church that the growth of individuals and the development of humanity is dependent upon the integration of liturgics and education, of the intuitive and intellectual, of socialization and development. It is not a question of either/or, but of both/and.*

**Display Slide 29**, Head & Heart Activity

Ask participants to take out **Handout 16 with the Venn Diagram**. Then encourage them to think about the various programs offered at their congregation (religious education or otherwise) and place them in the proper circle. Items which could be both can be placed in the space where the two circles overlap.

After allowing adequate time for the participants to complete their Venn Diagrams, send them into breakout rooms to share with others what they included in their diagrams and where.

If time permits, return the group from breakout rooms to discuss any reflections or new understandings participants had as part of their creating the diagram or learning from the diagrams of others.

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Closing reading

### **Description**

Remind participants to answer reflection questions before the next session in the online forum, as well as to do the reading and other assignments before the next session.

Share this poem from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Unitarian Abolitionist, Theodore Parker:

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere;  
its temple, all space;  
its shrine, the good heart;  
its creed, all truth;  
its ritual, works of love;  
its profession of faith, divine living.

# **SESSION 4: LIBERATION PEDAGOGY**

## **Background and Preparation**

### **Reading Assignments:**

Read the following handouts:



- Handout 17 Paulo Freire, “The Banking Method of Education”
- Handout 18 bell hooks, “Paulo Freire”

**Discussion Forum**

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from the session and post a response to the Reflections Questions in the Session 3, Discussion Forum thread.

**Webinar Information**

Date:

Time:

Webinar recordings will be added to the shared folder once completed.

**Session-at-a-Glance**

Opening	10 minutes
Significant Learning Experience	30 minutes
Freire and Liberation Pedagogy (aka critical pedagogy)	30 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes
hooks, Dialogue, and Teaching to Transgress	40 minutes
Closing	5 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

**Preparation**

- Practice reading the guided meditation (below) aloud

- Familiarize yourself with the handouts and slides for this session

## Opening (10 minutes)

Begin with these opening readings

From Parker Palmer, *Courage to Teach*:

“We can, and do, make education an exclusively outward enterprise, forcing students to memorize and repeat facts without ever appealing to their inner truth – and we get predictable results: many students never want to read a challenging book or think a creative thought once they get out of school. The kind of teaching that transforms people does not happen if the student’s inward teacher is ignored.

“The second truth is even more daunting: we can speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves.”

And this from the father of Process Theology, Alfred North Whitehead:  
“The purpose of education is not to fill a vessel, but to kindle a spark.”

Then **display Slide 30** and review the scaffolding for this lesson:

- Learning from last session:
  - To continue group building
  - To articulate one’s own philosophy of religious education
  - To gain a basic historical perspective on liberal religious education
  - To understand the Unitarian Universalist legacy in religious education
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To gain an experience and understanding of liberation pedagogy (aka critical pedagogy)
  - To engage in dialogue with self and others about participants’ own philosophy of religious education
  - To get a sense of the range of current philosophies of religious education among participants, congregations
- How that relates to the next session and beyond:
  - Continued learning will help us work toward a revised personal philosophy of religious education, and will prepare us for dialoguing with other stakeholders toward shared congregational philosophy of religious education

*And our reminder, there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that we hold our learning together in that awareness.*

# Significant Learning Experience - [Guided Meditation & Timed Free Writing] (30 min)

## Materials

- A journal or paper
- A pen or pencil

## Description

Begin by informing participants that they will need writing tools in a few moments, and now, prior to the meditation might be a good time to gather them.

Ask participants to sit back, relax, and still their gaze, either literally or in their mind's eye (if anyone asks, offscreen is okay, but remind them offscreen still means doing the meditation)

*Say: We're going to do a memory exercise. If you should find yourself becoming uncomfortable with this exercise, don't do it -- adjust as you need to. Otherwise, follow the instructions as best you can, and take what you like.*

Ask them to focus on breathing -- inhalation . . . exhalation -- then say:

*Think back to a time when you had a significant learning experience -- by significant, we mean of lasting importance.*

*Recall where you were -- try to be as specific as you can in your memory:  
what are the sensory experiences?  
notice who is present. . .  
notice who is not present. . .  
notice what those present are doing. . .  
notice what they're not doing. . .  
notice how you feel*

*When you're ready, return to the room where you are and this Zoom room we share. Feel your body if it's touching the earth, feel your back in the chair. Rejoin us here.*

Once you notice that all participants have returned, say:

*Take five minutes to jot down what you remembered in meditation about the significant learning experience.  
Be as specific and concrete as you can, writing down what in memory you sensed, what others expressed, who was present, how you felt. This writing is for*

*your use, personally, but you will have an opportunity to share about it, or about the experience of doing the exercise, in a bit.*

Tell participants that they will now be put into breakout groups to discuss the exercise.

**Display Slide 31** and ask participants to structure their conversations around the following:

- Give each member a chance to share what they recalled (if they wish to), and/OR what it was like to do the exercise
- Discuss commonalities -- anything your group begins to notice that might point to what makes for a significant learning experience more generally? Ask a scribe to make notes as you discuss.

Allow participants 10 minutes for discussion. Remind participants when there are 2 minutes left in breakout groups.

When they return, Ask for one person (or two if time) to share a little about their significant learning experience

- Make group notes on the shared whiteboard about what significant learning experiences may have in common -- things like:
  - Heightened awareness, or mindfulness
  - Sharing of ideas from diverse voices
  - A teacher/facilitator/mentor who cares about learner/s and their experience
  - Room for learner/s to be authentically themselves -- brave space
  - Investment or caring in a process or outcome
  - Repeated practice or skillbuilding
  - Permission to fail, learn, “fall forward” -- growth mindset

## **Freire and Liberation Pedagogy (aka critical pedagogy)**

**(30 min)**

### **Materials**

- Slides 32-33 Paulo Freire & Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Handout 17 Paulo Freire, The Banking Method (excerpt)

### **Discussion**

Introduce Paulo Freire and his education philosophy by highlighting some of these points:

- Brazilian-born Freire (1921-97) did not work explicitly within the field of religious education, but his theories have influenced a number of contemporary religious educators (including Thomas Groome, Letty Russell, and Rebecca Parker).

### Display Slide 32, Pedagogy of the Oppressed Part I

- Ask: had you encountered Paulo Freire before completing the readings for today's session?
- Had you learned before about the banking concept/method of education Freire describes and critiques? Did it sound familiar to you? Do you think you've experienced it?
- *If not covered in the discussion above, explain:* Freire's pedagogy begins with a critique of "banking education," a methodology which assumes ignorance on the part of the learner so that the teacher is the expert and the student is a passive receptacle (like a bank account) of preselected knowledge (and misinformation). Thus **the teacher dominates the educational process, controls the information, shapes perceptions, and maintains the status quo**. The more the students strive to store the "deposits" given to them, "the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*).
- *Explain:* Freire's deep conviction is that **education is inherently political** and that a liberating education has a reconstructive character because it involves a commitment to overcome the forces of oppression and reconstruct society. For Freire, **the purpose of education is to help the oppressed participate in the pedagogy of their liberation so that they can live the fullness of their humanity** (*Educating in Faith*, by Mary Boys).

### Display Slide 33, Pedagogy of the Oppressed Part 2

- Freire proposes "problem-posing" education (in place of the banking method) so that a "critical consciousness" can emerge and oppressions can be transformed. "Problematizing" recognizes that reality is socially constructed and acknowledges that the teacher doesn't have all the answers. Therefore, genuine educational situations must be characterized by dialogue (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*).
- Two ideas integral to Freire's work are especially representative of Freire's influence on the field of religious education: "conscientization" and "praxis." The first term refers to the process of coming to critical awareness of the social, political, and economic contradictions of "reality." The second term refers to his commitment to keep theory and practice in a dialectic so that one acts reflectively and thinks for action (*Educating in Faith*).

Encourage participants to look at Handout 17 on Freire. Briefly discuss as a whole group. **Display Slide 34** as you introduce the next task for small group discussion.

**Divide participants into breakout rooms** for 15 minutes to discuss:

- *Does Freire's description of the Banking Method of education resonate with your own experience of your education? If you have experienced the banking method, how did you experience that part of your education - negatively, positively, with neutrality?*

- *Have you experienced something like What Freire calls the Problem-Posing method of education? If so, where? Was it a significant learning experience; how did you experience it? What does it have to do with dialogue?*
- *How does Freire's idea of education as a means to transform society mesh with Unitarian Universalist religious education philosophy?*
- *What do you think of Freire's deep conviction that education is inherently political? Does politics (defined how?) affect education in our society? Does the way we teach and learn reinforce the status quo or challenge it (either or both)?*

Allow discussion in breakout rooms to continue for 15 minutes. Remind participants when they have two minutes before the breakout rooms close. After everyone has returned from the breakout rooms, invite reflection or comments on something said in their small group discussion.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **Hooks, Dialogue, and Teaching to Transgress [aka critical pedagogy] (40 minutes)**

Encourage participants to get out Handout 18: bell hooks, "Paulo Friere"

**Explain:** *Both bell hooks and Paulo Freire, before her, understand learning as profoundly dialogic.*

*Dialogue involves two or more speakers/listeners, but is different from debate in that, "in a debate, there is a winner and a loser. One person wins by putting forward a better argument, the other loses. It is intrinsically competitive and is about establishing difference."*

*In a dialogue there are two winners. I learn from you, you learn from me. We may compromise or agree to differ. It is profoundly reciprocal, and acknowledges similarity and difference equally" (from Essentials of Dialogue, [https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/IGC\\_Essentials%20of%20Dialogue\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://institute.global/sites/default/files/inline-files/IGC_Essentials%20of%20Dialogue_English_0.pdf)).*

*In her essay/self-interview about Paulo Freire, hooks both details a dialogue she held with Freire himself that created significant learning for them both -- and then innovates the idea of dialogue by reproducing, in written form, a dialogue transpiring within herself about that learning.*

**Display Slide 35** as you introduce the next task for small group discussion.

**Divide participants into breakout rooms** for 10 minutes to discuss:

- Is the concept of dialogic learning familiar to you? Is it something you've experienced? Has it been helpful to your growth or understanding?
- Where are you/have you been most likely to encounter this kind of learning?
- Is hooks's essay/self-interview useful to you in understanding Freire's work? Does it give you insight into the methods or benefits of dialogue?
- Do RE classes (PreK-12 or lifespan) in our home congregations offer opportunities for dialogue? For the sharing of personal experience and understanding, along with other kinds of (e.g., more evidentiary) knowledge?
- Are breakout sessions like this one useful to you as you learn about new concepts? How so, or how not?

Allow discussion in breakout rooms to continue for 10 minutes. Remind participants when they have two minutes before the breakout rooms close.

After everyone has returned from the breakout rooms, invite reflection or comments on something said in their small group discussion. Then guide a large group discussion on the following questions:

- How are the problem-posing method and dialogic learning related? (e.g., dialogue is important to discussion of problems posed; dialogue can help learners gain access to or articulate problems in need of considering)
- In your experience, is dialogic learning liberatory? Potentially? Consistently? What is required to get to liberation through dialogue? (e.g., dialogue helps foster critical consciousness by enacting and making visible a diversity of perspectives; pitfalls include too much or too little shaping or guiding by teacher)
- Why should liberatory practices, experiences be important in shaping UU RE? How does this philosophy or mindset or skillset relate to our principles?

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Closing reading

### **Description**

Remind participants to answer reflection questions before the next session in the online forum as well as do the reading and other assignments before the next session, where we'll be working toward:

- shared understanding,

- inclusive and liberatory praxis in our teaching, and
- collaborative philosophies of teaching

Share this reading from Anne Barker's poem (adapted for ableist language), "When the Unimaginable Happened," from *To Wake, To Rise*, as closing words:

Our hearts broke open and the Love that is still true  
draws us once again together, story by story, [piece] by [piece]  
into places of tender knowing, remembering  
to restore us, mend us, piece by broken piece

This is the Love that runs between us,  
sustaining force of restoration,  
the Love that nourishes and feeds us,  
binds us, each, to our collective core.

We grieve . . . and march . . . and weep . . . and sing  
and through the pain -- but not despite it --

Love will repair us, not the same, but stronger in some places,  
honoring memories like treasures  
living out our lives' potential  
in the shadow of the trespass  
in the warmth of one another  
in the light of what, restored, we will become.



# SESSION 5: STRETCHING OURSELVES TOWARD LIBERATION

## Background and Preparation

**Reading Assignments:** Complete the reading before the webinar for this session.

- Essay “Our Work for Social Justice” by Elizabeth Nguyen from the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*
- Essay “Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities” by Dr. Jacqui James from *Essex Conversations*
- Essay “Toward Wholeness & Liberation” by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley from *Essex Conversations*

Read the following handouts:

- Handout 19: Taking a Special Education Approach (*specifically pages 60-67 CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT to the end*)
- Handout 20: Tough Terms
- Handout 21: More Tough Terms

**Review these other materials prior to the start of this session:**

- [Dismantling White Supremacy Culture](#) from *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun
- [Preemptive Radical Inclusion](#) from C.B. Beal

**Prior to Class Beginning:** Create Breakout Rooms that participants can self-select to participate in. Make sure to include 1-3 rooms (depending on number of participants) for individuals who identify as “**Centralized Identities (White, Cis, Hetero)**”, at least one room for those who identify as “**BIPOC**” and at least one room for those who identify as “**(Non-Racial) Marginalized Identity**” Make sure that the settings are set so that participants can choose which room to participate in themselves. Be prepared to facilitate group adjustments, depending on what identities are represented in your large group.

**Review these other materials prior to the start of this session:**

- [Dismantling White Supremacy Culture](#) from *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun
- [OWL Taking a Special Education Approach](#)

**Discussion Forum**

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from the session and post a response in the **Session 4, Discussion Forum** thread.

### **Webinar Information**

Date:

Time:

Webinar recordings will be added to the shared folder once completed.

### **Session-at-a-Glance**

Opening	10 minutes
The Hard Way	10 minutes
Tough Terms for Unitarian Universalists	15 minutes
Social/Emotional and Learning Challenges	25 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes
Building Strong & Radical Religious Communities	30 minutes
Toward Wholeness & Liberation	20 minutes
Closing	5 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

### **Goals**

- To continue community building
- To consider the meanings and implications of religious terms that may be challenging for some Unitarian Universalists
- To consider the ways our congregations exclude or include people (either intentionally or unintentionally)

- To gain a basic understanding of white supremacy culture and how our congregations are responding to diversity
- To explore differences between theories of liberalism and liberation when it comes to religious education and faith development

## Opening (10 minutes)

### Materials

- Opening reading
- Slide 36

### Description

Share this chalice lighting from the resources packet, “The Promise and the Practice,” by the Rev. Rebekah Savage:

We light our flaming chalice as a beloved people  
united in love  
and thirsting for restorative justice.

May it melt away the tethers that uphold whiteness in our midst.  
May it spark in us a spirit of humility.  
May it ignite in us radical love that transforms our energy into purposeful action.

This a chalice of audacious hope.  
This chalice shines a light on our shared past,  
signaling our intention to listen deeply, reflect wisely,  
and move boldly toward our highest ideals.

Then **display Slide 36** and review the scaffolding for this lesson:

- Learning from last session:
  - To gain an experience and understanding of liberation pedagogy (aka critical pedagogy)
  - To engage in dialogue with self and others about participants’ own philosophy of religious education
  - To get a sense of the range of current philosophies of religious education among participants, congregations
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To consider the meanings and implications of religious terms that may be challenging for some Unitarian Universalists
  - To consider the ways our congregations exclude or include people (either intentionally or unintentionally)

- To gain a basic understanding of white supremacy culture and how our congregations are responding to the challenge of diversity
- To explore differences between theories of liberalism and liberation when it comes to religious education and faith development
- How that relates to the next session and beyond:
  - Our differences and experiences will shape our own philosophies, but it is important to expand beyond our personal existence and consider how others are impacted in order to have a more complete understanding and philosophy for our programs

*And our reminder, there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that we hold our learning together in that awareness.*

## The Hard Way (10 minutes)

### Materials

- Essay: “Our Work for Social Justice” by Elizabeth Nguyen from the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*

### Description

Refer to the essay by Elizabeth Nguyen where she talks about “there is only the hard way.”

Share this excerpt:

*“Many of us want to do the right thing, the just thing, the generous thing, and also not to have to give anything at all ... we want to be part of that powerful, courageous, game-changing, direct action without the long-past-midnight planning meetings, the messy decision-making, the frayed relationships, and the constant wondering if this is even worth it.”*

Divide participants into breakout rooms for 7 minutes, as indicated above (Centralized, BIPOC, Non-Racial Marginalized identities), inviting them to reflect on these questions:

*Are our congregations doing the hard work of living our faith out in the world?  
What challenges do we face as religious educators when it comes to doing the “hard work” of our faith?*

Let participants know when they have two minutes left in the breakout rooms. Bring them back, but *do not invite groups to share in the large group, so as to minimize possible harm.*

# Tough Terms for Unitarian Universalists (15 minutes)

## Materials

- Slide 37 Tough Terms for UUs
- Handout 20 Tough Terms
- Handout 21 More Tough Terms

## Description

Introduce this section by saying some of the roadblocks to doing the hard work of our faith and developing the necessary relationships in the community for social justice work is the continued legacy of the rejection of religious language.

**Display Slide 37** and invite participants to take a sheet of a paper, fold it in half, and then fold it in half again. Ask them to open the paper and label the four quadrants with the following terms: faith, religion, spirituality, and ethics. Then invite them to write, in the appropriate quadrant, at least five or six words they associate with each term. Remind them that Handouts 20 & 21 contain many of the “tough terms” many Unitarian Universalists still struggle with and might be useful for this exercise. Let them know they will have 5 minutes to complete this activity.

**Divide participants into generalized (not identity-specific) breakout rooms** to discuss the “tough terms,” their associations with them, and their feelings about them. Allow ten minutes for small group discussions.

Let the participants know when they have two minutes left for their conversations. After all participants have returned from the breakout rooms, invite participants to share anything they found meaningful in the conversations.

Close with the words of Rev. Jean Nieuwejaar from the book, *Fluent in Faith*:

“Our children need good words to bring their spiritual lives into focus and to engage with others about their religious journeys. The core concepts of many of the ancient words are relevant to these tender, young spiritual journeys, as they are to our own. Our work is to reach beyond the often narrow meanings attached to these words, to find the beauty in their depths. If we can talk comfortably about prayer, faith, and salvation with our children, we needn’t fear that they will adopt narrow, damaging notions of these concepts. These words will come to mean for them whatever they mean in the integrity of our minds and hearts. If we do this work well, our children will not learn rigid, archaic meanings but will adopt life-affirming meanings that are consistent with our faith.”

# Social/Emotional and Learning Challenges (25 minutes)

## Materials

- Handout 19 Taking a Special Education Approach
- Ramon Selove's [Neurodivergence Series recorded webinar](#)

## Preparation

- None

## Description

Begin this part of the session by commenting that we've reviewed who in our congregations influences religious education philosophy and how some historical figures have influenced our religious education philosophies. We've explored theories of learning and faith development. Now we will consider how to be welcoming to congregants with special needs.

Ask participants to review Handout 19 "[Taking a Special Education Approach](#)" facilitator resource from the *Our Whole Lives* program **with a focus specifically on the Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment section (beginning on page 60)**. Name that since this resource was designed for OWL, not all components from this resource will apply to the general religious education environment, but many of the suggestions can be applied in other educational settings. Also ask participants to recall thoughts from watching Ramon Selove's interview or to review the transcript of the webinar.

Ask participants to reflect on the following questions in breakout rooms, noting that if they have different learning needs and feel comfortable sharing with their group, they may speak to what has helped them personally in learning environments:

*What is new to them from these resources?*

*What experiences do they have as educators on creating inclusive learning environments for persons with all different needs?*

*How might our congregations be more welcoming to people of all needs?*

*How does Universal Design for Learning (mentioned in the webinar) help to create inclusive environments for all?*

Allow participants 10 minutes for discussion. Remind participants when there are 2 minutes left in breakout groups, and when they return, give them a moment to share any major points that came up or any burning questions.

Close by stating

*We minister to all people in our congregations and it is important to practice C.B. Beal's idea of [Preemptive Radical Inclusion](#).*

*This means that we intentionally position ourselves, before we know anything at all about anyone in the room, to presuppose that everyone is already, and always, in the room. We don't wait for an individual to tell us what they need, and THEN meet their needs, we create experiences that preemptively involve them. The burden is on those in leadership to be aware of the needs of the people we are most likely to miss.*

Beal emphasizes that Preemptive Radical Inclusion is not just a box to check in a planning process, but is instead a philosophy through which we organize our lives and our work. As we go on our 5-minute break, I encourage you to consider the ways in which it might inform your practices and philosophy in the future.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

### **Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities (30 minutes)**

#### **Materials**

- Slide 38 Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture
- Slide 39 Embracing Diversity

#### **Preparation**

Review the following materials in advance of this session:

- Essay: “Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities” by Dr. Jacqui James from *Essex Conversations*
- [Dismantling White Supremacy Culture](#) from *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun

Also, re-familiarize yourself with Handout 10: “Other Perspectives on Developmental Stages” and **make sure you have created the breakout rooms as described in “Preparation” above, and be prepared to adjust depending on needs of participants of marginalized identities**

#### **Description**

Begin this activity by highlighting these points from the essay, “Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities.” by Dr. Jacqui James:

*Even in our liberal congregations, despite many years of passing resolutions on issues of social justice, we continue in largely subtle, unintentional, and unconscious ways to oppress and exclude people ... Acknowledging the many ways in which our society and our religious communities continue to separate*

*and divide people based on their ‘perceived differences’ is another of our tasks. It is to ignore much of what we do see, to feel that we have no way to intervene, to blame the victims instead of the systems that hold the various oppressions in place – to be part of what holds these systems in place instead of being about the business of dismantling oppressions.*

**Have participants self-select into breakout rooms that were described in the preparation section above and discuss:**

*What are the barriers in our congregations/settings to creating radically inclusive communities?*

*What are some ways our programs exclude and oppress others?*

*Who is it we are excluding or oppressing, either intentionally or unintentionally?*

Allow groups 8 minutes to discuss in their small groups. Then after everyone has returned, invite sharing of the process and the conversation (you will want to consider if this can be done with sensitivity or you may skip large-group sharing).

Encourage participants to recall the Mark Morrison Reed video and their reading assignments, particularly the elements of [white supremacy culture](#):

**Display Slide 38:** Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

Briefly go over the aspects of white supremacy culture as displayed in the slide.

Then ask:

- *Where do you see white supremacy culture at work in your congregation or other UU organizations?*
- *How are you working to dismantle white supremacy culture in your church community or religious education program?*

**Display Slide 39:** Embracing Diversity

Briefly go over the aspects of embracing diversity as displayed in the slide.

Then explain:

*Since our dominant culture equates words such as “white supremacy” and “racism” with right-wing extremist hate groups, white people are fearful to admit their own racist biases, many of which may be unconscious and just a part of being in a culture which is largely white supremacist. Creating liberated communities requires a culture shift, especially for white people to own the ways in which they may be unknowingly impacted by implicit bias.*

*Developing an understanding that racism is systemic – and not just individual – in our society is crucial. Because it is the water in which we swim, it is impossible to escape the systems of race and oppression that form how we position ourselves in relationship to one another. Those of us who are white can find it challenging to*



*accept that despite good intentions, we often speak, act, or behave in ways that perpetuate systemic racism. Those of us who are people of the global majority continue to experience microaggressions and have different work to do to get to a place of liberation for all.*

*Yet, our faith calls us to the ministry of anti-racism and anti-oppression and it is essential that we all do our personal, internal work to become aware of our biases and to reflect with people of our own identities so we can grow. We are called to liberation for all.*

Have participants self-select into breakout rooms again. Then ask them to explore:

*For Everyone:*

- *Where is your congregation on the journey toward dismantling white supremacy?*
- *What conversations and actions around anti-racism ministry are happening in your congregation?*

*For the “White, Cis, Het” and “(Non-Racial) Marginalized Identities” Caucus Groups:*

- *What actions are you taking in your religious education program to dismantle white supremacy?*
- *What learning do you need, as a religious professional, to be better equipped for this ministry?*

*For the BIPOC Caucus Group:*

- *Where do you find spiritual sustenance to care for yourself while working in a white-majority faith and/or congregation?*
- *Who are your co-conspirators?*

**Allow groups 10 minutes** to discuss in their small groups. Remind participants when they have 2 minutes left. After returning the participants from their breakout rooms, ask for reflections from the group members, any new understandings or challenges which arose (this may be a sensitive or charged conversation; be especially mindful of how comments shared may impact learners of color in the group and use your best facilitator skills!).

Remind participants that we have just begun to scratch the surface of this topic and that if they are white and are just beginning their anti-racist journey, it is a spiritual imperative to continue honing an anti-racist lens. This can be done by reviewing in greater detail the resources outlined at the beginning of this session along with a number of other resources, such as [\*White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism; Caste; or Uprooting Racism.\*](#)

Close with this quote from Dr. Jacqui James' essay, *Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities*, from *Essex Conversations*:

*“Our task is to provide skills, tools, and attitudes that help to dismantle the various oppressions and build bridges between people. A large part of the task of the educating community is to prepare people for the lifelong nature of this work ... change happens so slowly that it is easy to become discouraged, to begin to think that this is never going to happen, and certainly not in our lifetimes. It is the responsibility of our religious communities to equip people with ways in which to nurture and sustain themselves through this journey.”*

Then ask:

*Are we preparing people for the lifelong nature of the work of social change?*

*How does this perspective on challenging the cultures of exclusion in our congregations and the notion that one of our tasks is to equip people for the long haul of social change shape our religious education philosophy?*

## **Toward Wholeness & Liberation (20 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 40 Equality/Equity/Liberation/Inclusion
- Essay “Toward Wholeness & Liberation” essay by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley from *Essex Conversations*
- Essay “Education as Liberation” essay by Rebecca Parker from *Essex Conversations*

### **Preparation**

- Review essays by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Rebecca Parker from *Essex Conversations*

### **Description**

Introduce this part of the session by saying something like:

*In the essay, “Toward Wholeness and Liberation,” Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley critically explores some of the issues of our anti-oppression work and some of the impediments to our spiritual wholeness. The author distinguishes between liberalism and liberation. Likewise, Rebecca Parker in her essay, “Education as Liberation” stresses that humanism and spirituality must be united, a factor she believes obliges*

*religious educators to actively counteract systems that dehumanize people. Parker also sets forth a model for congregationally-based social action as an educational practice.*

Then ask:

*What does Parker outline for a model of social action as educational practice?  
How would you apply Parker's model for a congregational setting in the context of the local community?*

### **Display Slide 40** Equality/Equity/Liberation/Inclusion

Invite comments and reflections on the graphic. Then divide participants into breakout rooms (using the identity-based groups at your discretion) for 10 minutes to discuss:

*What are the strengths and limitations of liberation theology for religious education?  
What does a liberationist approach to UU religious education look like?  
How does our collective Unitarian Universalist identity (our inherited history, heritage, and culture) affect our willingness to move from liberalism to liberation and away from oppression?*

Allow participants 10 minutes for discussion. Remind participants when there are 2 minutes left in breakout groups, and when they return, give them a moment to share any major points that came up or any burning questions (again using your facilitators' discretion for the group's ability to handle this conversation with care for all).

## **Closing (5 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Closing reading

### **Description**

Remind participants to answer reflection questions before the next session in the online forum and to complete the assignments necessary for the last session.

Share this excerpt from Carol Thomas Cissel's "Words Matter" reading from *The Promise and the Practice* Worship Materials as closing words:

Words matter. They lift and hold us.  
They illuminate the future and shower us with possibilities.  
When misused, they hurt.  
Verbal cuts and abrasions sting.  
Language leaves wounds that become scars.

Words matter.

Please don't invite me to sit at your table  
unless you have a warm, satisfying meal to serve.  
It doesn't have to be a gourmet feast; a potluck is fine.  
The soufflé may only have risen halfway.  
The cookies might be burned on the edges.  
The pasta can be overcooked.  
That's okay. I'm starving.  
What it must be is full-filling, real, made with love, and ready to be eaten.

# SESSION 6: CREATING A PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## Background and Preparation

### Reading Assignments:

- Review the statement you added to the Discussion Forum prior to session one on “religious education is ...” (you may want to print it out, type it into a Word document or have it viewable online because we will be adding to them in this session)
- Read Makaanah Morriss’ essay, “Doorway to the Sacred” from *Essex Conversations*
- Read handout 22: Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources

### Discussion Forum

After the webinar, reflect on the readings and discussions from the session and post a response to the Reflection Questions in the Session 5, Discussion Forum thread.

### Evaluation

Please have participants submit the Participant Evaluation—Online Module within a week after the module ends.

Facilitators should submit the [Facilitators’ Evaluation](#) within a week after the module ends in order to receive compensation.

### Webinar Information

Date:

Time:

Webinar recordings will be added to the shared folder once completed.

### Session-at-a-Glance

Opening	10 minutes
Doorway to the Sacred	15 minutes
Reflection of Evolution	20 minutes
Website & Brochure Critiques	20 minutes
BREAK	5 minutes

Goal Setting & Meeting Planning	45 minutes
Closing	5 minutes
	Total Time: 2 hours

## Opening (10 minutes)

### Materials

- Opening words

### Description

Share this Children’s Wording of the Sources by Michelle Richards from the book, *Come Into the Circle*, as a call-back (one leader says the wording, then the other leader responds with the next line in an alternating fashion):

We can search for answers in the magic and mystery of everything alive.

*We can search for answers in the words and deeds of people who showed us how to live fairly and in peace.*

We can search for answers in the sacred texts and wisdom from the world’s many religions to inspire us to do what’s right.

*We can search for answers in Jewish and Christian teachings which remind us how to love our neighbor and treat them how we wish to be treated.*

We can search for answers in logic and science which helps us remember our priorities and how important the choices we make are.

*We can search for answers in traditions which celebrate the earth and show us how to live in harmony with nature.*

Then **display Slide 41** and review the scaffolding for this lesson:

- Learning from last sessions:
  - To consider the meanings and implications of religious terms that may be challenging for some Unitarian Universalists
  - To consider the ways our congregations exclude or include people (either intentionally or unintentionally)
  - To gain a basic understanding of white supremacy culture and how our congregations are responding to the challenge of diversity

- To explore differences between theories of liberalism and liberation when it comes to religious education and faith development
- Intended learning and application for this session:
  - To consider the UU Principles and sources and how they impact RE curriculum and culture
  - To personally reassess one's own current Philosophy of RE and reiterate the understanding that the philosophy is fluid and should continue to change, shape and develop over time.
  - To consider how to bring these ideas to their congregation and which stakeholders would be best included in the conversation and how that may reshape shared philosophy
- How that relates beyond:
  - The concepts discussed over the 6 sessions should emphasize the ideas that successful programs require shared understanding and evolving philosophies through dialogue

*And our reminder, there is extra work involved for marginalized groups in our faith (all of the time). This is shared so that we hold our learning together in that awareness.*

## **Doorway to the Sacred (15 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Handout 22 Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources

### **Preparation**

- Review the notes provided in the Description before leading this activity.

### **Description**

Say something like:

*Makanah E. Morriss, in her essay "Doorway to the Sacred," writes that UU religious education is all about unlocking people. Encourage participants to describe some of the keys to opening the sacred doorway in our lifespan religious education for the coming years that the author articulates as "unlocking people."*

Then ask:

- *What role do the UU Principles & Sources play in the philosophy and programming of our learning communities?*
- *What are the implications for selection of curriculum and curriculum development?*
- *How does (or could) utilizing the UU Principles and Sources help us to build in diversity and inclusion for all people? How does this also create tension around appropriation?*

# Reflection of Evolution (20 minutes)

## Materials

- Participants' "Religious Education is ..." statement from preparation for first session

## Description

Say something like:

*At the beginning of this module, we considered, "What is religious education?" and the philosophy behind using other words such as faith formation or faith development. We have examined the "who," "what," "where," and "how" religious education happens through the essays of Essex Conversations. We have explored how the philosophies of the past and the realities of the future are both in conflict and yet interdependent. After every topic we've explored, we've asked: "How does this fit into our philosophies of religious education?"*

*In preparation for this session, we added another question: "What is **your** philosophy of religious education?"*

*We hope you have integrated your understandings from your learning experiences of this module into a comprehensive philosophy of religious education. From the foundations of our religious education philosophy we build the goals for our lifespan religious education programs, plan activities to meet those goals, and recruit and train teachers and leaders to engage participants in these experiences. Throughout the coming year, you may be asked many times to express your religious education philosophy to parents, teachers, and your entire congregation.*

Ask participants to share their updated philosophy of religious education, commenting on how it has changed since they wrote in the forum during their preparation for Session 1 ("Religious Education Is...").

**Send participants into breakout rooms** to share and discuss how their religious education philosophy statements have evolved during this learning experience. Before the break, bring them back to the larger group and ask for sharing of some highlights from their group discussions.

# Website & Brochure Critiques (20 minutes)

## Materials

- Various sample RE program websites and/or brochures with philosophy and/or goals listed

Examples (*these sites show philosophy and/or goals as of 03/2022*):

<https://uucomo.org/re-overview/>

<http://ccuu.org/study-ministry-overview/>

<http://www.uufsb.org/61-religious-education/children/84-re-goals>



<https://www.uucr.org/learn>  
<https://www.firstparishscituate.org/learning>

### **Preparation**

- Find or prepare sample RE program websites or brochures with articulated philosophies of religious education and/or the goals based upon that philosophy.
- **Check to be sure that none of the examples that you are using are of the congregation that one of your participants is serving.**

### **Description**

Introduce this section by saying:

*Due to the openness of the internet, we often have access to the websites and brochures of our colleagues' programs. This give us an insight into what others in our field are doing in their approach to Religious Education Philosophy, and how to live out those philosophies through goals of the program.*

*Having a place (or places) for your program's Religious Education Philosophy to be displayed, as well as goals that have been articulated from that philosophy, will give your congregation clear check-points to make sure that those goals are being worked on and met, and will make it clear to perspective families and others what you program's focus really is.*

*Let us take a look at a few program websites, looking for clearly stated philosophies, goals, or both.*

Using the "Share Screen" feature, share each website one by one, pointing out where the philosophy and/or goals are listed.

Have participants help point out what they see, what may be missing, and if they feel (as someone "new to the congregation") that these listed ideals help them better understand the Religious Education Program of that congregation.

## **BREAK (5 minutes)**

## **Goal Setting & Meeting Planning (45 minutes)**

### **Materials**

- Slide 42 Preparing for Your Religious Education Committee

### **Preparation**

- None

## Description

Introduce this section by saying:

*A congregation's religious education philosophy should be created in collaboration with invested partners such as the minister, members of the Religious Education Committee/Council, teachers, and parents. Now that you've each had a chance to articulate a philosophy of religious education for your program and explore it with others in this setting, you'll prepare to share it with the collaborators in your congregation as a starting point for articulating a shared understanding for your program. As a part of that preparation, you'll have time to name the goals that may be a product of your stated philosophy of religious education.*

**Display Slide 42** and let participants know they will have 10 minutes to jot down some goals for their program.

Then invite them to breakout rooms to share their program goals with one another, discussing the formats in which they might share the final products after they've been able to reflect with their collaboration partners (i.e. update their websites with their new philosophy of RE statement, create a brochure to handout to newcomers, etc.). **Give them 15 minutes in the breakout rooms** to share and provide feedback to one another. Let them know when they have 2 minutes left.

Bring the participants back from the breakout rooms and ask the groups to articulate commonalities across their individual programs' goals. The more groups you have, the less time each group has to present, so you as leader will need to adjust the time for each group to share based upon how many groups you have.

Encourage participants or group leaders to upload any documents created to the shared folder.

After all groups have shared, emphasize that all of this work was done in an effort to bring these points and ideas back to their congregations. A good step going forward would be to plan a meeting with important players in the congregation to help share, articulate, and approve (or update) the philosophy and goals of their program.

*Ask the participants who in their congregation might need to be a part of such a visioning conversation.*

End by asking participants if there any quotes, readings, chalice lightings, etc. that they encountered during their time in this class that they would consider using when planning a meeting to set out the Philosophy and Goals of their Religious Education Program.

If no one has any ideas, each leader can share one of their own.

# Closing (5 minutes)

## Materials

- Closing words

## Description

Remind participants to respond to questions for this final session in the online forum. The online forum will be up for one week following the close of the module. If participants missed responding to any of the session's reflection questions, they will have a week to complete their assignments. Remind them that these reflection questions are an important part of completing the module.

Remind Participants (and leaders!) that they should also complete the online evaluation within one week of the close of the module:

<https://www.uua.org/careers/re/renaissance/evaluation-forms>

Offer closing words from the last chapter of Betty Jo Middleton's book, *To Touch Inward Springs*:

*As we seek to become more truly educating communities, instead of dividing the church into worship, education, music, service and social action components, perhaps we may think of ways in which we can provide all of these experiences to people of all ages ...*

*We live in a time of change and uncertainty. We must be courageous and creative to meet the needs of the times ahead. We are called to new beginnings even as we honor what has gone before, that we may be worthy of the heritage we have been given. It is our privilege and responsibility to contribute to this heritage of hope and faith and love for children, and for tomorrow's.*

# LEADER RESOURCES

## Online Forum Discussion Questions

### Before Session One

Please introduce yourself. Include your current role, the congregation you serve, your pronouns and any other information you wish to share with the group to help us get to know you better.

What is Religious Education?

### Session One

What are your thoughts on the idea of a religious community as a learning community?

What do you think of the idea of religious education as relationship building? How can those relationships be built?

### Session Two

What is your reflection on the “I Believe, I Feel, I Act” activity?

What new insights do you have after discussing Fowler’s Faith Development Theory, including its criticisms?

How does Daniel Harper’s essay on “Learning Types and their Needs” affect the faith development of our youth and adults? How do we balance the needs of “old youth” as opposed to “new youth”?

### Session Three

Do you see the purpose of religious education as being to hand on a religious tradition or to create a new world?

How do the past philosophies of religious education affect our philosophies today? Are there any elements you can trace back to Fahs, MacLean, the Multimedia Kit Era or the RE Committee Futures Era?

What are your reflections on John Westerhoff and the Head & Heart activity?

## **Session Four**

What new insights did you gain from Paulo Freire and his Pedagogy of the Oppressed?

How does reading bell hooks's self-interview about Paulo Freire help shed light on the importance of Freire's work – for hooks herself or for us reading her/them?

What does reading these authors' work side-by-side help you to understand about how truth unfolds (or for that matter, how this course is set up)? How should this inform our practices in Religious Education/Exploration or Faith Development? In the congregation more broadly?

## **Session Five**

How can we work for the elimination of oppression and white supremacy culture in the greater world when we have trouble working on these issues in our own congregations?

What is the difference between liberalism and liberation?

Liberation theology also addresses the needs of marginalized communities (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled people, women), voices that are oftentimes enveloped as a part of general UUism or are simply ignored. How can we adapt our congregational life to lift up and value the voices of marginalized communities, giving them a louder voice in our mostly-white congregations?

How is examining oppression and white supremacy culture within our congregations an important part of religious education philosophy-making?

## **Session Six**

What is your philosophy of religious education?

What insights/reflections/comments do you have after completing this module?

What essays are missing from Essex Conversations: themes we face today which were not an issue (or as large an issue) twenty years ago – like technology?

# LIST OF HANDOUTS

## **Session 1**

- 1 Introduction to Renaissance and RE Credentialing
- 2 Preparation for Module Evaluation
- 3 Creating Covenant
- 4 Religious Education Philosophy Module
- 5 Session Topics
- 6 Religion as Relationship Building

### **Session 2**

- 7 Constructivist Learning Theories
- 8 Faith Stages According to Fowler
- 9 Criticisms of Fowler's Theory
- 10 Other Perspectives on Developmental Stages
- 11 Wrought Faith: Minding What We've Missed in Faith Development

### **Session 3**

- 12 Dewey and Progressive Education
- 13 Fahs and MacLean
- 15 John Westerhoff: Modes/Dimensions of Consciousness
- 16 Head and Heart Activity

### **Session 4**

- 17 Paulo Freire, "The Banking Method of Education"
- 18 bell hooks, "Paulo Freire"

### **Session 5**

- 19 Taking a Special Education Approach  
(specifically pages 60-67 *CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT to the end*)
- 20 Tough Terms
- 21 More Tough Terms

### **Session 6**

- 22 Unitarian Universalist Principles & Sources

### **Additional**

- 23 Online Resources for Religious Education
- 24 For Further Reading

## Sample Welcome Letter from Leaders to Online/Hybrid Participants

Hello to all of our Philosophy of Religious Education Online/Hybrid Module Participants!

We look forward to our first online meeting for the Module on (date). Since this module has been designed in many respects to model a “flipped classroom,” it is important for you to do the assignments before the sessions. During our online sessions, you will want to have some paper on hand for note-taking and some of the activities or plan to have a text document open for the exercises and note-taking.

This online **Philosophy of Religious Education** Renaissance module is a distance learning experience comprised of **six** two-hour webinars with reading and other assignments for each session. Credit will only be offered for full participation in the module. Full participation includes:

- Online attendance at all two-hour sessions
- Reading and reflection to prepare for each session
- Responses to Reflection Questions on the Discussion Forum after each session and **reply to or comment upon at least one other person’s post**. Note: The Discussion Forum will remain active until two weeks after the module closes.
- Submission of final evaluation within a week of the ending of the module

### Readings and Resources

The resource material for this module consists of five essays from the book, *Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education* (Boston: Skinner House, 2001), four essays from the *Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*, the text *Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.*, an article, and videos, as listed below. It is best if participants obtain the books before the module begins:

From *Essex Conversations*:

- Hoertdoerfer, “Religion as Relationship”
- James, “Building Strong and Radical Religious Communities
- Bowens-Wheatley, “Toward Wholeness and Liberation”
- Morriss, “Doorway to the Sacred”
- Harper, “Learning Types & Their Needs”

From *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, Sixth Edition*:

- Bray McNatt, “Our Faith”
- York, “Our Religious Education”
- Nguyen, “Our Work for Social Justice”

- Hauser, “Our Communities”

*Learning Theories Simplified, 2nd ed.* by Bob Bates. This text is on the 2022 RE Credentialing Program Resource List and provides easy-to-digest synopses of more than 100 learning theories. (see sections on Vygotsky, Piaget).

#### Other

- Article: [Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development](#) or watch video: [Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory](#) (YouTube, 5:21)
- Joy Berry's "[Wrought Faith: Making Faith Happen](#)" (YouTube, 19:12 mins)
- [Gail Forsyth-Vail's RE History video](#) (36:32)
- Ramon Selove's [Neurodivergence Series recorded webinar](#) (36:42 mins)

The Handouts for the Philosophy of Religious Education Renaissance Module can be downloaded from the Group page's [module materials](#). You will be responsible for printing your own copies of the handouts or having a window open on your computer (or other electronic device) so that you are easily able to refer to them during our online meetings.

## Technical Considerations

- The preferred webinar platform is Zoom, which you can download from the Zoom website.
- Use a laptop or computer and camera; have your phone handy in case you need to call in instead of using computer audio.
- You should have created a UUA profile name as a part of your registration process if you did not already have one. If the facilitators are having trouble being adding you to the Renaissance Module group on UUA.org, email them with your profile name; please include the module name in the subject line. To access the module online, log in with your UUA profile, and follow the link provided.

Subscribe to comments in the Discussion Forum in each session. To post on the forum, click on the post and add your comments (please do not add a new post!). If you'd like to respond to a particular comment, look for the “reply” link below that comment (there's also a like button and other options). Be sure to save!

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact one of us leaders.

Sincerely,  
(Leaders' names & emails)