

A Guide to Maria Harris's *Fashion Me a People*

By Gaia Brown

Fashion Me a People is both deep and rich. The late Maria Harris wrote it from her perspective as a (liberal) Catholic. This guide helps make this resource more broadly accessible by translating both the Christian theology and the Greek terminology into universal insights for faith development. We UUs can find many areas of common ground with Harris.

In the following notes, *italics are used when examples are given of how Harris's ideas relate to, or can be adapted for, Unitarian Universalism. They are not Harris's own ideas.*

Introduction

Harris briefly describes five different forms of curriculum in the church. She expands on these concepts later in the book.

Kerygma (kur IG ma) - **proclamation**. For Harris, this is the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, which is central to Christianity.

Unitarian Universalists might see our seven Principles, and the values and concepts behind them, as central to our faith. When we assert the inherent worth and dignity of every person, we are proclaiming a core belief of Unitarian Universalism.

Didache (think of the word didactic) - **teaching**.

Leiturgia (think of the word liturgy) - public service; the work of the people. This is what people come together to do in community. For Harris, it is prayer and the act of taking communion. *Unitarian Universalists often use the word liturgy to refer to how they move through a Sunday service; it is what is written in the order of service. **When we worship together**, lighting a chalice, singing a hymn, reciting a bond of union, we are experiencing our liturgy. We sometimes say "worship" is "worthship" - how we acknowledge what is of greatest worth to us.*

Koinonia - A participatory sharing in a common religious commitment and spiritual community. (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*); in a word, **community**.

Diakonia (think of the word deacon) - **the act of serving**. This is reaching out to others, personally and communally, locally and globally.

Harris informs us that curriculum is more than materials, is lifespan, and is experienced throughout the entire life of the church, not merely in the classroom.

PART ONE: THE CONTEXT

1. Church: A People with a Pastoral Vocation

We are called to care for ourselves, for one another, and for the earth which is our home. (p. 24)

The pastoral vocation has at least three components: priestly, prophetic and political.

(James Luther Adams, Unitarian theologian, spoke of the priesthood and the prophethood of all believers.) As a priestly people, we honor traditions. As a prophetic people, we call for justice and are empathetic with human suffering. As a political people, we have the authority to call the systems of our world to accountability. There is tension between Personal and Communal: We are only fully persons when we are in community and in communion with one another. Local and Global: Each local community will forge its identity in terms of its global relations within the entire church. (p. 31) *What does that mean for us and our polity? For instance, how do local congregations respond to initiatives of the UUA? What tension is there between our individual congregations (or congregants) and the rest of the world?*

Clergy and Laity: The ordained and non-ordained share power. Our differing roles complement one another and often overlap. (p. 33)

2. Church: A People with an Educational Vocation

If children witness lifespan education in the church, they will realize that education is never finished.

Education is the act of giving form, as a potter shapes and reshapes clay. Hence, “fashion me a people.” *Unitarian Universalists may prefer the concept “nurturing a people,” which sounds less directive. What kind of people do we wish to nurture in lifespan UU religious education?*

Religious education is an interplay of the five forms of ministry: proclamation, teaching/preaching, worship, community and outreach. It is not just instruction. The whole church community is the responsible agent for religious education. The ultimate purpose of education is what we do with that learning – how we live it.

3. Curriculum: The Course of the Church’s Life

From its Latin origin, curriculum means “a course to be run.” Traditional concepts of curriculum have centered around experience, process, or purpose and have assumed a concept of school.

We must distinguish between “education” and “schooling” and acknowledge that education refers to “all the life forms that do educate: family, sports, work and worship.” (p. 64) Schooling is only one form of education.

Subject matter has many layers. Subject matter is information about concepts and it is also the meanings and feelings that the subject matter allows us to conceive. Human beings are also subjects who name themselves, rather than objects defined by others (Paulo Freire). Thus the subject matter of the church is all the forms of church life and also the people of the church and the creative interplay among all these elements.

Curriculum must be priestly (informed by the past), prophetic (open to the future) and political (in touch with political realities inside and outside the church).

Curriculum must take into account its three forms (a model by Eliot Eisner):

The explicit curriculum – what is intentionally presented, what we say we are doing, *for example, what we present in a prospectus;*

The implicit curriculum – patterns and procedures that frame the explicit curriculum. *For example, our church budget – how we allocate our money. The implicit curriculum can support or contradict the explicit curriculum.*

The null curriculum – that which does not exist: content left out, procedures not used; issues never mentioned. Leaving something out is not neutral. *For instance, if all our materials refer to families headed by a mother and a father, all other forms of families are part of the null curriculum.*

PART TWO: THE VOCATION

While Harris discusses each of the five components of curriculum individually, she continually emphasizes how they overlap and interplay with each other.

Koinonia: The Curriculum of Community

Harris begins here because this is where people start: they come to churches because of a deep need to feel a place where they can belong. They long for community. Community as governing reality: In community, we uphold our traditions. *When we light our chalice, we connect ourselves with every other Unitarian Universalist congregation that is also lighting a chalice, and we also connect ourselves with Unitarian Universalists of the past and with those who will light a chalice in the future.*

Community as convicting reality: We seek wholeness. That includes a unity with nonhuman creation (*the interdependent web of all existence, 7th Principle*) and with people of all cultures (*the goal of world community, 6th Principle*).

Both the congregation and family are community settings in which religious education takes place.

Curricular tasks for the congregation:

To be inclusive of all levels of participation (*Members, Friends, those who just want to be involved in social justice activities but not attend services*) and to be welcoming

Leadership opportunities, *including small group ministries, committees*

Outreach: the community is taught by the way it is lived. (p. 85)

Curricular tasks for the family:

Presence: This is where, through relationship, we learn who we are and how to be in community

Receptivity: This is where we learn the concept of hospitality and where we can be fully accepted for who we are.

Responsibility: That we are morally responsible *to* all things and all people.

The interaction of these six curricular areas will lead to a “world community of communities” (p.89). (*The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, 6th Principle*)

Leiturgia: The Curriculum of Prayer

Prayer includes adoration, asking forgiveness, thankfulness and petition. *We might use the terms awe and wonder in place of adoration; and meditation for prayer*

Personal prayer: Harris, recognizing that some people would say their entire lives are a prayer, urges us to see prayer as a time set apart from the busyness of the rest of our lives, so that we might be open and receptive. *For us, may be meditation.*

Corporate prayer: With this, the community forms its identity. Retreats are one kind of corporate prayer. *When our Boards or Committees or Youth Groups go on retreat, they form their identities as a group. When we take time for group building with our fourth graders, it could be viewed as a kind of prayer.*

After listing several reasons why attendance at worship services has dwindled, Harris lists the curricular tasks that are necessary to revitalize corporate worship. Spirituality: beyond prayer, spirituality can also be our way of being in the world. People are responsible for developing their own spirituality and affirming the spirituality of others. (*Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations, 3rd Principle*)

Prayer must be integrated with social justice.

Many people of all ages should be involved in corporate worship. (*And because we do not have a centrally dictated form of worship, we might disagree with Harris and say that the form should, at least at times, be varied.*)

A center for resources. *What support can we give to families to help them integrate ritual into their activities?*

6. Didache: The Curriculum of Teaching

Teaching and instruction have been part of the Jewish and Christian traditions since their earliest days. Teaching includes a body of knowledge and the process through which it is imparted. (*Angus MacLean: “The medium is the message.”*)

Forms of Didache

Catechesis: (*Our UU history and tradition, the seven Principles, our six Sources*)

Preaching: which is also a form of kerygma (proclamation). Through this, the

congregation comes to know itself and its responsibility of service to the world.

Contemporary forms: Raising questions about the tradition. (*For UUs, raising questions is the tradition.*)

Curricular Tasks

A wide range of settings, including worship, community, family, service to others, speaking out against injustice.

A wide range of teachers: instructors, parents, mentors, other adults brought into the classroom or teaching situation.

A wide range of forms, honoring multiple ways of learning, incorporating the four elements, giving opportunities for learning and discovering through actions and activities

Overcoming European and North American bias.

7. Kerygma: The Curriculum of Proclamation

Kerygma means both what is proclaimed and the act of proclaiming. The power of words comes from the concept that when the ancient prophets were speaking, they were speaking the word of God. We now are personal participants in that word, speaking it, interpreting and living it, and listening to it. The community also speaks, embodies and listens to the word.

What we are proclaiming is justice for all, the proclamation of release from bondage for the poor and oppressed, especially where we, through the creation of unequal economic and political structures, are responsible for the bondage. There is no “other.” “I look in your face and I see mine - even if you are another age, another race, another sex.” (p. 130) Justice is not one among a list of virtues but is *the* proclamation.

Forms of Kerygma

Scripture. The Bible. *Our sacred texts draw from our six Sources.*

Theology. Because of human diversity, there are many theologies. The respectful conversations among these theologies can be the curriculum of kerygma.

Preaching. Art can be a form of preaching; it is an expression that conveys reality. We are called both to declare glad tidings and to speak out against forces of evil.

Curricular Tasks

Priestly listening, with receptivity and responsiveness to the proclamation.

Prophetic speech, calling out against the injustice in the world. : “We, the people of this church, cannot live out our pastoral vocations with our backs to ----”(racism, poverty, homelessness, etc.). (p. 139)

Political advocacy – speech taken on behalf of others.

8. Diakonia: The Curriculum of Service

If we heed the biblical injunction to love our neighbors as ourselves, service will be an act of joyful gratitude.

Outreach is not acts of charity or pity, but acts of compassion, meaning “to suffer with.” The action is not one-way, but two-way.

Forms of Diakonia:

Social care, such as pastoral care. It involves the one doing the caring as well as the one who is cared for; they are both part of the system.

Social ritual, including peace marches, vigils against the death penalty. The community comes together and reaches out with patterned, artistic expression.

Social empowerment - helping so that others may help themselves; for instance, teaching someone to apply for food stamps, rather than just giving a bag of food.

Social legislation - we are called to be involved in civic life, actively working to change the structures that oppress our neighbors near and far.

Curricular Tasks:

Diakonia (the ministry of serving) means actually *doing* something (not just talking about it) and doing it *publicly*.

PART III: THE PLANNING

9. Facilitating the Fashioning

“[W]hat you think curriculum is determines how you think curriculum is created.”
(p.167)

Since the middle of the 20th Century, curriculum planning has generally been some variation of setting goals, deciding how to achieve those goals, and then evaluating whether the goals have been met. Harris would like us to look at curriculum planning “from a religious and artistic angle of vision, in contrast to one that is technical and mechanical.” (p. 170)

Harris challenges five assumptions regarding curriculum. She maintains

1. Curriculum is more than teaching.
2. Curriculum is more than academic resources.
3. Education is accomplished not just in school but in all of life’s activities.
4. Knowing and understanding is a process, not a product that can be measured.
5. Education is a lifelong endeavor.

Curriculum planners should think of themselves as artists, as the potter who works with clay, so that we can “fashion a people.” We re-order and re-create experience to give it meaning. What we do will be intuitive rather than technical. The movement of the process we create will take us where we are to go. The process will be more like a dance than a straight line.

The Process:

Contemplation – be open to be spoken to and surprised

The issues:

Finding leaders who will be responsible for having the vision on behalf of the community and communicating the vision to the community

Identifying the current explicit, implicit, and null curricula of the church, with the understanding that the church *does* have a curriculum, because it *is* one.

Contemplating the purpose of the curriculum. *What is our mission?*

Engagement - getting our materials and selves in order, discarding that which we won't use; deciding what to keep, what to let go of.

Formgiving - the leaders (see above) will form subcommittees, each looking at one of the five elements of curriculum, bringing in more people who have gifts in these areas. Printed curricular materials might be of use here, along with other kinds of resources. Eventually, as the people work together, they will come to realize they are the subject matter being molded.

Emergence - after some time, maybe even years, there is an intentional “birthing” of the new curriculum, maybe on a small scale like a retreat for church leaders, maybe on a large scale like a multi-week festival.

Release - the leaders who have done the work of creating the program allow it to take on its life in the larger congregation, with all the challenges and changes that will follow.

Responses/Guide to Maria Harris' *Fashion Me a People* for Unitarian Universalists

Important elements of a Unitarian Universalist spiritual path include:	Elements of the church's Mission and Ministry: (elements of Christian formation - Harris, p. 25)	Implications/things to consider in UU religious education and Unitarian Universalist formation:	For comparison: Five components of Balanced Youth Programming (UU)
<p>Gathering regularly in community to recognize and celebrate that which is of worth-worshipping together.</p>	<p>Leiturgia PRAYER AND WORSHIP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship • Chalice lightings • Rites of passage • Spiritual practice 	<p>Worship</p>
<p>Encountering and reflecting upon wisdom from the sources of our living Unitarian Universalist tradition</p>	<p>Didache TEACHING</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content from six sources • Stories • Preaching as teaching • Learning styles 	<p>Learning</p>
<p>Becoming part of a caring faith community with whom you share your story, your struggles, your wisdom, your celebrations, and which helps you to affirm your place in the interdependent web of life.</p>	<p>Koinonia COMMUNITY (for Harris, this comes first)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group ministry • Sense of unity, wholeness • Environmental awareness and concern • Inclusion of those with disabilities • Anti-oppression • Family ministry 	<p>Building Community</p>
<p>Acting in a way consistent with your faith and with the call to grow the Spirit of Love and Justice in the world.</p>	<p>Diakonia SERVICE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service projects • Prophetic speech • Involvement in community and world beyond the congregation 	<p>Social Action</p>
<p>Being open to the transforming power of Love in your life, and willing to carry that transforming power into your family, your community, your world</p>	<p>Kerygma PROCLAMATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Outreach • Faithful living • "I do this because of my UU faith.." 	<p>Leadership</p>