

Today's a big day, here at the Fellowship. At least we hope it's a big day for at least some of us. How many of you knew this was a big day because it's the first day of classes for the youngest of our community? I'd assume those of you who knew are, in some way, connected to our Children's Lifespan Faith Development Program. I find that a mouth full so I just call it Children's RE, religious education. But more on that a little later.

If you didn't know this was a big day, it's likely due to the fact that you are not intimately connected to Children's RE. And if you are not connected to Children's RE, you probably wouldn't know what was going on in that part of our community.

There's an interesting parallel here. If you're not connected, you probably don't know. And if you don't know you probably are not connected. In my mind, those two statements go in a different direction. On one hand, do you not know because you were not informed? Or do you not know because you did not seek to know?

What's of particular interest to me about this parallel, is that the two statements are connected. Parallels, by definition don't meet. But these two concepts, which I see as parallel are not at all separate and different. Even while at a surface level they sound different, they both lead to the exact same place. They show us that there is a gap in our community. One part does not know what the other part is doing. There is a disconnection. At least across the information sharing spectrum.

Now that's not at all unusual in Unitarian Universalist church communities. I don't know if I've ever been in a UU community where there was not such a disconnection between what goes on upstairs and what goes on downstairs. The differences have all been in degree. Some have a wide gap and some have a much smaller gap or disconnection.

As I think about this gap, I can see two different ways that the gap can exist or grow. If the people with the knowledge assume the part of the community without the knowledge simply is not interested in having the information, they probably won't share their knowledge and information. On the other hand, if the people without the knowledge demonstrate no interest in knowing, then they are not likely to find out what's going on.

I find this dynamic notable, especially notable in the context of Unitarian Universalist congregations. Congregations that espouses a belief in a set of principles that include the interconnected web of all existence, and a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

Perhaps there's fine print that says, interconnected web... of adults and the inherent worth... of those over, let's say, 5 feet tall. Perhaps the young people don't know that they are Unitarian Universalists and find no particular connection to the larger whole.

So, what does any of this have to do with the title of my sermon, Teaching? We are a community, a group in relationship with one another. Our interactions extend over time. We are in relationship. People in extended interaction both teach and learn from one another, they affect one another, as in an interconnected web.

Like neighbors, we might teach the other what they can expect from us. Maybe we let them know we'd be happy to watch the house while they're gone, or water the plants. Perhaps we teach them that we have no particular interest in them. Communities are people in relationship and through these relationships, we teach one another. Communities are places of teaching and learning. We impact each other, often in ways we don't see and can't imagine.

I suspect what's behind the gap between what's going on in our RE space and what's going on in the rest of our community is the way we think about children and the way we think about education. I suspect we, like most of us in our society, think about education as something that happens in the classroom. If you go to enough classes, over a long enough time, you'll obtain various degrees as a banner of accomplishment and will at some point arrive, you will have completed your education.

The other reason I believe there's a gap between our children's programs and what happens in the rest of our community is the way we think about children. We see a child and one of our first reactions is "that child belongs to that set of parents". We see children as separate from us because we are not their parents; they belong to someone else. This construction leads to the perception that a child solely belongs to a parent and the child's education and well being also belong exclusively to the parent.

This construction/perception has not always been the norm. There was a time when an entire community took responsibility for the children in that community, both for their well being and their education. Stories abound of the woman in the third floor apartment calling down to the street to tell some child they should not be doing what they were just seen doing. Can you imagine that happening today? I think we've lost an important part of community when we no longer see the children as ours, but rather as theirs.

Maria Harris speaks to both the notion of children as ours and the subject of education, in her book, *Fashion Me A People, Curriculum In The Church*. She writes from a Christian perspective about the role of a faith community. She uses the term curriculum in its broadest sense. She tells us the word curriculum comes from the Latin word "currere", meaning to run, as in a course to be run. In an academic sense, it is a course of study or training. At the same time, she tells us the word is associated with the notion of subject matter.

Harris focuses on the subject matter of a faith community, its curriculum, in service of fashioning a people of faith. She tells us the first appearance of such a curriculum is found in the book of Acts, in detailing the work of the first Christian community.

There are five Greek words used to identify the subject matter, or work of the church: Kerygma, meaning to proclaim one's faith. Didache, the actual activity of teaching. Leiturgia, which is the coming together in prayer or worship. Koinonia, being in community and diakonia, which is the caring for those in need. The book of Acts tells that Proclaiming, teaching, worship, community, and caring is the work of a faith community.

Harris says that a faith community is a people with a mission, which means sending. The mission of the people who *are* the faith community is to go into the world and live out our principled beliefs. She says that our vocation is a call to, a demand for, a particular way of living. She says we are called to care for ourselves, for one another, for the earth, which is our home. We are called to end our isolation from others by living each day of our lives rooted in love.

In *Fashion Me A People*, Harris says that we are only fully persons when we are in community and in communion with one another. Although we may not be our brother's and sister's keeper, we are our brother's and sister's brothers and sisters.

If this is true, then the young ones among us would not only be the children of their parents, they would be our nephews and nieces. In other words, in Harris's construction of a faith community, the young among us would be part of us, an extension of us, and who we are.

In terms of Didache, the actual activity of teaching, she reminds us of the words of the Brazilian philosopher of education, Paulo Freire. Freire tells us that pedagogy is never neutral. Whatever is taught, whatever is learned always exists within a context, and carries a particular perspective. So teaching is political.

Teaching in the context of a faith community is also political. Its teaching leans in the direction of building up a body politic. Harris says its a body "striving to make that body be, in form and polity, the kind of organism where power is never power over, or power against, but power used with and in favor of and for one another and the wider society. Teaching is towards creating the situation of koinonia [community], where all may be one, an activity of mutuality and helping others claim their own best possibilities, not only for themselves, but for the sake of ...the world.

So the teaching we do in our classes is important, both for the specifics of what is being taught and the particular perspective that goes with it. But the teaching of our young people in their classes is not the only teaching that's going on here in our faith community. As a result of being in community, of being in relationship, we teach and learn from one another.

As Harris says in *Fashion Me A People*, "the whole community as agent is, by its ways of living together, speaking together, praying together and worshiping together, causing a ...recognition in person after person that reveals them to themselves, saying, I am being educated by and in this community to become who I am."

So let us not treat our young people as a separate community. Let us embrace them as an extension of ourselves. Let us not fail to recognize each and every member of this community as one of us; as brother and sister, as an extension of ourselves. Let us not forget that we exist within the context of a faith community, and that this faith community has a mission to live out our principled beliefs. We have a particular perspective that matters.

May it be so, amen.