

Three-Minute Theorist

Maria Harris, Roman Catholic Religious Educator



What you need to know about Maria Harris is her book *Fashion Me a People* and the idea it contains, which is that our faith is formed throughout our lives and in every *area* of the life of the church. For Harris, the church itself is an educator, teaching to and through various forms to shape us into the people God has made and is making.

The Big Idea

Following the metaphor of church as teacher, Harris says we might think of the different areas of church life as *curriculum*. She means that in the broadest sense, as both the way we teach as well as the subject matter.

For Harris, five curricula together comprise the vocation of the people of God:

- *Koinonia*, that's Greek for community, is the curriculum that gathers us together. "The fashioning of a people," Harris says, "does not occur unless a people exists to be fashioned."
- *Leiturgia* is the curriculum of prayer, including both corporate worship and personal spirituality. Harris is quick to note that we cannot separate it from the other curricula that call us to action in the name of justice; *leiturgia* is truly the *work* of the people.
- *Didache*, the curriculum of teaching, concerns both the doctrines and traditions we receive and pass on but also the manner of this transmission. So catechesis is a part of teaching, but so is preaching, discussion, reinterpretation, or any activity that gets us critically engaged.
- *Kerygma* is proclamation, the message of scripture and our sharing it with others. Harris reminds us of the way Jesus understood his *own* proclamation, with special attention to "the unheralded, the unsung."
- The final curriculum is *diakonia*, loving service: caring and gathering, empowering and advocating. It's no coincidence she names this one last, for our service of others springs from our gratitude.

Making It Work

What's powerful about *Fashion Me A People* is its integrated vision. Harris knew Christian formation doesn't just happen in Sunday school; it happens whenever and wherever the people of God live into their vocation.

But it happens better when we name what's going on.

So when you're training your acolytes and readers, remind them that their approach to worship will shape their faith and that of those around them. Or when preparing for a service project or returning from an advocacy event, have a structured conversation about the meaning of the work and what it showed your group and others about the God of love.

We've seen these ideas reenergize churches that don't have the numbers or money for lots of fancy programming. Even those that do will benefit from a culture change that makes space for learning moments and regular reflection.

The lasting gift of Maria Harris is the reminder that to form faithful Christians, our most important job is to be the church together.