

# WOODLAKE

Imagining,  
Living and Telling  
the Faith Story.

# THEORY & PRACTISE

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TOOLS FOR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

DISCOVERING

# Whole People of God



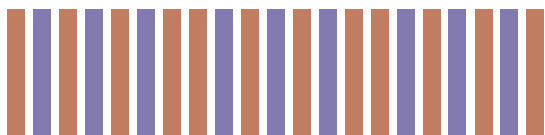
INCLUDING :

If It Doesn't Impact the World  
It's Not Worth It

■ Marilyn Perry & Cheryl Perry

Theologic & Education Foundations  
The Story

Simple and Easy to Use  
The Parts



## If It Doesn't Impact the World It's Not Worth It

### A conversation with *Whole People of God* founder Marilyn Perry

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This page: Marilyn Perry holds a sample pack from the early *Whole People of God* days, in her Kelowna, Canada home.

Opposite page: Marilyn Perry, left, and daughter Cheryl Perry, hold a gift Marilyn's children had made for her years ago when she received an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from St. Stephen's College in Edmonton for her work on *Whole People of God*.

If Marilyn Perry were to trace back along the tendrils of her life that created the *Whole People of God* curriculum, she'd find herself as a youngster at Sunday School. There, a revelation would enter her life as a whisper and stick, invisibly, for a decade.

Marilyn, now in her senior years, tells this story from a plush chair next to an unlit fireplace in her tidy, Kelowna, Canada home. Outside, a true Canadian winter swirls onto the streets. Marilyn speaks in long sentences and exquisite detail about her lifelong commitment to *Whole People of God* – Wood Lake Publishing's lectionary-based Sunday School curriculum, which was first distributed in 1987 in all its hand-painted, hand-collated glory, and is today used by congregations around the world.

At twelve years old, Marilyn Perry and her Sunday School peers spent much of their time in class squirming in their seats and talking, unwilling or unable to focus on the teacher reading out of her quarterly, which followed a long church service.

"We had been the worst girls' class. So finally, they got this woman from the Y who hadn't much background in theology, but she knew girls," says Marilyn.

While reading the Christmas story in the book of Luke, which references a virgin birth, the new teacher says, somewhat offhandedly, 'And that's what the Roman Catholics think.'

"And I'm thinking, *why is she saying that?* That's what we all think," says Marilyn.

It wasn't until she was in her 20s, and taking a course at a Lay School of Theology, that she realized the magnitude of that offhand remark.

"It hit me that she was giving us permission to not see it literally." Marilyn's words move slowly – deliberately. "So from the time I was little I was



given permission to see beyond what was written and I didn't want us to ever put something down as though it was the gospel truth," she says.

So this sentiment – this revelation – became the sun that gave *Whole People of God* life. And it was not something Marilyn took lightly.

"I was going to be influencing the faith of the next generation. And that's a huge responsibility," she says.

## FILLING A GAP

Marilyn first saw the need for an inclusive, well-organized curriculum, while working as a Christian Educator at St. John's United Church in Regina Canada in the early 1980s, finding herself frustrated with what was available. Everything either seemed too out of date, too poorly organized, or too strictly American. So Marilyn rolled up her sleeves and got to work. Soon, a group of Christian Educators in Regina – all women – banded together on the project. As interest spread wildly, having clearly struck gold in noting the deficiency, they decided to base the curriculum on the lectionary. The first year saw nearly 2,000 people working on various aspects of it, from hand-painting teaching pictures, to teacher-trainers, which the group deemed an important aspect of the curriculum early on. Into the third year of working tirelessly, Marilyn and the others were absolutely exhausted. And the United Church, which was expected to take on the curriculum, suddenly wasn't in a position to do so. Somebody suggested Wood Lake Publishing, so Marilyn, who had by then moved to a neighbouring community of Kelowna, approached founder and publisher Ralph Milton and, as they say, the rest is history.

## TRULY ECUMENICAL, REFLECTIVE OF THE REAL WORLD

Marilyn stayed on as an editor – learning to type to do so – once Wood Lake took on the curriculum, on the condition it remain a team effort of denominations. Ralph agreed and soon representatives of the United, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches were all on

board, with the shared goal of a curriculum that reflected them all.

"I think that was the richness of the whole thing," says Marilyn. "We had to find a way to make it work for everybody."

Cheryl Perry is the Minister of Social Justice at Kelowna's First United Downtown, as well as Marilyn's daughter. She used to attend retreats where that common ground among denominations was forged.

"We lived in community for a week at a time ... and we shared worship at the beginning and end of each day," says Cheryl, sitting across from her mother. "Many of us said, 'I wish we could take this back to our own congregation and recreate the same sense of feelings of engagement with the scripture with our own people.'"

During such retreats, participants would sit around a large table, having already read the lectionary passages, and talk it out.

"It didn't get watered down though," says Cheryl. "Sometimes to find common ground you have to let ... all the specificity of your denomina-

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This page: Cheryl Perry is Minister of Social Justice at Kelowna, Canada's First United Church. She organizes the church's Sunday School program, which uses *Whole People of God*.

Opposite page: Since its early days, *Whole People of God* curriculum takes into account a spectrum of different cultures, including who in the Bible was black. This Bible was a gift from one of the Resource People brought in to share their culture with the team.

tion's perspective go, but I don't think *Whole People* ever did that."

Yet still, the focus on social justice intrinsic in United Church ideology was preserved.

"The Anglicans kept saying to us, 'you United Church people, you always take a story and you look for the social justice piece of it. Can't you let a bible story be just what it is?' And we couldn't," says Marilyn, cracking a slight smile. "If it doesn't impact the world, it's not worth it."

So, the happenings of the world permanently settled into the space carved for it in the curriculum. Beyond that, from its beginnings, the curriculum was infused with various cultures. Resource People were brought in specifically to share their cultural wisdom.

"People bringing their ethnicity to us helped us," says Marilyn. Such insights taught the group who in the Bible was black, and that *Jesus Bids a Shine* was in fact a segregation hymn. They learned how the Japanese on Canada's West Coast during the Second World War were treated, plus many other lessons. All these seeds of knowledge were planted into the curriculum and there grew the name: *Whole People of God*.

"Even in the logo ... there's someone in a wheelchair, old people, and young people, and people with different hues of skin-colour," says Cheryl. "That was an important aspect of the curriculum from the beginning."

## CURRICULUM TAKES OFF

Undeniably, *Whole People of God* contained a sort of magic, and even the most modest expectations of how well the curriculum might do in its first year were significantly off. The group would have celebrated jubilantly if 200 congregations signed on in that first year. They quadrupled that – 800 – and the numbers skyrocketed from there. Today it's used by congregations around the world including in the UK, South Korea, Denmark and Morocco.

"When it first went to the 'States, we felt really badly," says Marilyn. A big reason *Whole People of God* was developed was because of the issues that





arose between borders, such as a discrepancy in the spelling of certain words and different heroes.

“(The U.S. curriculums) didn’t fit for us, and we didn’t want to impose it on them,” she says. So the team quickly hired an American Editor to tweak the product for American audiences.

Although Marilyn was indeed surprised at how rapidly the curriculum took off, she didn’t dwell. Rather, she once again rolled up her sleeves, working hard to ensure the curriculum was suited to all those who paid to use it.

“I did workshops with our native people because I worried we were imposing on them white culture, even though we had stories of (aboriginal people) in our curriculum.”

Marilyn stayed on as editor for 10 years with Wood Lake, driven by deep desires to both ensure it continued to meet the needs of a spectrum of congregations, and that it continued to breathe as a moving, living thing that would serve all children who engage with it.

## FUN AND RELEVANT

When asked about why the curriculum still works today, more than 25 years later, the answer lies both in its simplicity and the lectionary which it’s based upon. Although Marilyn is no longer involved with updating the curriculum, she speaks as a Sunday School teacher.

“You start with something about their own life experience, and you show how the Biblical story can relate to that experience,” says Marilyn.

Plus, it’s a lot of fun, which Cheryl points out.

“You’re hooking the kids with something like a science experiment,” she says, sharing an example of one such trick.

“You take a Ziploc bag of water, and you can poke sharpened pencils through the bag and through the other side and it doesn’t leak.” She explains this while laughing – both Cheryl and Marilyn’s eyes are dancing. “You do it over somebody’s head and there’s this moment like, this is amazing.”

But, wait. What does this have to do with the lectionary?

“It’s about seeing and believing as it relates to Thomas,” says Cheryl. “It’s not the piercing, but the surprise and the doubting and the seeing is believing.”

The lectionary piece also helps with connectivity, says Cheryl.

“It was obviously the dream that the parents in church listening to the sermon would have heard the same passages read, then their kid comes home with a picture of Moses and the 10 commandments, and they’re like, ‘right. We just heard that story too, so we could have that conversation.’”

Cheryl says that while *Whole People of God* isn’t a flashy-looking curriculum, its substance surpasses its counterparts.

“You look at other curriculums out there, they’re colourful, they’re slick, they’re super expensive, their theology is rather horrible,” she says.

For Marilyn, it is what it has always been, alongside so much more.

“I think it’s still simple,” she says.

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# Theological & Education Foundation: The Vision of Whole People of God

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In 1979 Marilyn Perry began working at St. John's United Church in Regina as their part-time Christian Education person.

Marilyn came from a strong church family. Her father, Ralph Wilson, had worked in the United Church headquarters for over 20 years, first as secretary of the Board of Men and later as secretary for the Pension Department. His enthusiasm for the church proved contagious. Marilyn loved the church. She participated in CGIT groups. While still a teenager, she had decided that she wanted to work for the church full time.

As an adult she continued to lead CGIT.

She also explored the possibility of becoming a diaconal minister. She talked with Harriet Christie, principal of the United Church Training School in Toronto. Candidates for the school had to have either a BA or professional training and several years of experience. Marilyn decided to continue teaching public school for two years before attending the Training School.

That remained her plan – until she met Dave Perry and decided to get married. At the time, women who got married lost their diaconal standing. Marilyn decided against pursuing the two years training, a decision she later regretted. Dave was a minister and assured her that, as a minister's wife, she could still be involved in many leadership activities, which she did in large measure. As Dave moved from congregation to congregation, she took over the role of Christian Education worker, reading through the curriculum and training the Sunday school teachers.

### Disappointment in existing curricula

St. John's was her first paid Christian education position. As always, she approached the job with the utmost seriousness. It frustrated her that some resources, such as the United Church's *Core*

*Curriculum*, were already two decades old and badly out of date. The newest resource, *Loaves and Fishes*, was full of great ideas but was not an organized curriculum. Still others were too American.

The wife of the minister at St. John's, Dorothy Logan, had had previous experience writing for *Wow* and *Surprise*, Sunday school papers that were used in the primary and junior segments of the *Core Curriculum*. She and Marilyn began writing their own curriculum materials. They worked in this way for a year and a half. Then the pastor moved back to Ontario and Dorothy with him.

Marilyn then began working for St. James United Church. The Sunday School superintendent there was Joan Robertson. Marilyn hadn't known it, but Joan had also been struggling to rewrite and update the *Core Curriculum*. The two women began working together. They were soon joined by Lorna King, the superintendent at the Heritage United Church. Like Marilyn and Joan, she was a school teacher and deeply committed to quality childhood education.

### Creating a new curriculum

The snowball effect continued. Evelyn Black, who replaced Marilyn at St. John's joined their informal group, then some people from Knox Metropolitan. Lorna King became a Christian Education worker at Whitmore Park and took her involvement with the curriculum with her. In a very short time, most of the Christian Education workers in Regina had heard about what was happening.

One of the ministers in the presbytery, Don Faris, approached the group. "Right now the curricula out there are not satisfying anyone," he told them. "The thriving Sunday schools are the ones who can afford a CE worker who writes curriculum for them. It's not fair. It's not fair that churches have to be big enough and have enough money to hire someone to do CE. I think you should really be doing this for all the churches in the Regina area."

It sounded like a great idea, but the group didn't

think that their congregations would be overly excited about paying them to work for other churches. Don felt confident that, as a group, they could get some funding from the General Council Experimental Projects Committee.

This sounded serious. They formed an ad hoc committee of 14 people to come up with a proposal. If they were really going to write their own curriculum for a whole presbytery, they needed to clarify their values and objectives. The curriculum needed to address the group's major concerns:

- It must integrate worship and Christian education.
- It must be biblically based. Children, not to mention adults, no longer had a solid grasp of the Bible.
- It must use inclusive language.
- It should be colourful and inexpensive. (They soon learned that “colourful” and “inexpensive” are mutually exclusive terms.)
- It should include a resource for parents, so they know what their children are learning and can reinforce it in the home.

As good as all these ideas sounded, no one had a clear idea of how to integrate the various elements structurally. Except Don.

“We could base the whole thing on the lectionary,” he suggested.

“That would make it biblical, and also allow the integration we want between Sunday school and what’s happening in church.”

The group was skeptical. Some had already looked at the lectionary and decided that it represented a worship structure, not an educational structure. The four passages given for any one Sunday often seemed to have little to do with one another. How in the world would they unify them intellectually, let alone in a presentation geared for children? And yet, no one could come up with any other structure that achieved the same integration. They agreed to try it.

The committee presented its proposal and got the green light and the money. They could begin.

## DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLICATION

### Brainstorming

The problem of creating a unified presentation based on the lectionary might have remained insurmountable had the project continued as an endeavor of six to eight individuals. But the group decided that, while they would “write up” the curriculum for the presbytery, the presbytery itself had to create it.

Two people from each of the 25 participating churches in the presbytery met as a brainstorming group. They tried to discern what the lectionary passages for each Sunday said to them in their own lives. Then they thought about what those same passages might say to children of various ages. Themes leapt off the page. The faith questions, and how children could relate to them, became obvious. The brainstorming group also shared ideas for resources, activities and hymns.

### Writing

After the brainstorming group met, the writer’s group, now about ten people, took the accumulated materials and insights and developed refined lesson plans. They repeated the process week after week, unit after unit.

One of the benefits the writers discovered, and one of the insights of the original planners, was that because they worked with so little lead time, they could make the curriculum incredibly current, with examples taken virtually from the previous day’s news.

### Paint, paste and pack day

The curriculum also included all the resource materials necessary for teachers’ presentations and student activities. To pull this off, the group organized “Paint, Paste and Pack Days” (PPP Days). Three or four people from each congregation met for a day to collate lessons, paint pictures, assemble flannelgraphs, count out supplies, and pack each congregation’s order.

Early on, the curriculum committee also decided that teacher training was crucial. On the

evening of PPP Day, a workshop session trained the people who would in turn train the teachers in each of the churches.

### **A gift of community, to community**

In a very real sense, the curriculum became a gift of community, to community. That first year involved the efforts of close to 2,000 people: 50 “brainstormers”, 10 writers, 100 people for the PPP Days, 75 teacher trainers, 222 local church teachers, and 1,536 children.

That uniqueness created interest beyond Regina Presbytery. Others wanted to use it. The Regina group, however, felt over-extended already. They simply didn’t have the energy or resources to go national.

Their premonition proved true. During the second year, people began to tire. By the third year, they were burned out and barely able to cross the “finish line.”

And yet interest from outside Regina remained keen. At the end of the first year, an article in *Exchange* magazine had spread the word. People wanted this new curriculum. As they began their third year, the Regina group approached the national church in the hope that it would take the project over.

From the perspective of The United Church’s Division of Mission in Canada, though, the timing was bad. They were in the midst of their “Future Directions” consultation. And although the Regina curriculum closely matched the statement of principles the consultation was developing, that statement was being rewritten and repackaged to make it more understandable. The process the Division was committed to required that the statement then go to the congregations for reading. The Division simply couldn’t make a decision on any curriculum until the statement of principles had been formally approved.

“If you could get a publisher like Wood Lake Books to do it,” they suggested, “then that’s what you need to do.”

Marilyn Perry had moved to Naramata, British Columbia, a year and a half into the Regina

project. Even so, the Regina group had adopted her as a “lifetime” member and continued to send her the materials. Having been turned away by the national offices, the Regina group turned to Marilyn.

“Could you approach Ralph Milton and Wood Lake Books on our behalf...?” they asked.

Marilyn called Ralph.

Ralph could barely believe his ears. He held the receiver a little tighter.

Marilyn: “Might Wood Lake be interested?”

Slight pause.

Ralph: “Uh, yeah. We might be interested. Could you send me some of their material?”

### **The Whole People of God comes to Winfield**

When the material arrived, Ralph and Bev went through it. It was good stuff, really good stuff. And it needed a lot of work.

They made arrangements to have dinner at Marilyn’s house and talk business. The day they chose happened to be Grey Cup day, so they watched the game and later ate supper. By the time they got to the business at hand, Ralph had a terrible migraine. They talked a little, but finally Ralph had to stop. “Could we meet again when I’m feeling better?” Ralph wondered.

Two weeks later, Marilyn drove to Kelowna to meet with Ralph. They met in the muffin shop. Marilyn had a migraine.

In desperation they set a third date. Marilyn’s place. Ralph threatened that if either one of them had a migraine, the thing would never get off the ground.

The day came. Marilyn felt great. She thought about putting a sign in the window, “Ralph. I don’t have a headache. Come on in!” but decided against it. What would the neighbours think?

They reached an early agreement. Ralph believed in the project but didn’t have any money. Wood Lake could only do the curriculum, he said, if Marilyn agreed to edit it. She agreed, but there were still other matters to work out.

Distributing a curriculum nationally was more



complex than producing and distributing it locally. The craft supplies that had always been included would have to be left out. Teacher training had also been central to the curriculum. But how do you do that when you can't meet face-to-face? A video seemed like a possible solution, but Ralph was already anticipating the pressure they would face to get the curriculum out on time.

"Maybe next year," he suggested.

Marilyn balked. "To leave out the teacher training," she said, "would destroy one of the basic principles behind the curriculum." The video got made with the help of Barb Anderson and Tim Scorer, who had done a number of videos for Naramata.

The final point, like the first, concerned money. "If it sells and makes money," said Ralph, "we'll split the profit. If it doesn't and we go in the hole, well, I won't ask you to pay half the shortfall."

Having all but forgotten the long, long days and deadline pressures of her editing days in Regina, Marilyn enthusiastically plunged into the new venture.

### **Grant requested and received**

In the meantime, Ralph put together a strictly commercial proposal to the Department of Communications of the federal government. He pointed out that most Canadian church money spent on curriculum materials went south of the border. He also claimed, somewhat brazenly perhaps, that Wood Lake could sell the curriculum to 200 congregations the first year, 500 the second year, and 1,000 the third year. After that, perhaps other denominations would pick it up.

The curriculum would also look different. It would sell, he said, not because of glossy presentation, but on the strength of the editorial content. Furthermore, most congregations had photocopiers and would be given permission to duplicate materials themselves. Lastly, while most curricula are developed once and used until people get tired of them, this one would be done on computers and updated annually. Ralph asked for \$70,000. To his utter surprise, he got the entire amount.

### **Office mayhem**

During the first summer of the curriculum's production, an outside observer might have thought Wood Lake was trying hard to kill off its staff. If that indeed was the perception, the reality differed only in that Wood Lake's motives were basically good, and the staff were basically willing.

Consulting from time to time with people like Irene Hart, Donna Scorer and others who had experience with very small children, Marilyn virtually researched, rewrote, edited, and compiled the first year materials herself.

For the staff, it was a larger project than any of them had ever undertaken. To complicate matters, the Winfield office had just begun using Macintosh computers and desktop production software.

At the end of April, Ralph called Lois Huey Heck. Given the letter she had received a year previously she was surprised the company still existed. He invited her to come work on the curriculum. He could guarantee her work for four, maybe even six weeks. They intended to have the materials to the printer by the end of May or early June.

Lois had just finished a heavy year at school and had moved house, but she said yes. Her first job was to learn how to turn on the computer. Her second job was to learn how to use the word processing program. Her third job was to meet Marilyn, figure out what had to be done, come up with an overall design, and proceed from there.

Actually, Ralph had expected Lois to enter the text. Then he discovered that she typed with three fingers. Realizing that Lois could never enter all this material in time, Ralph hired Pat Uniat to do the keyboarding, and rented a second computer from a local Lutheran pastor. Lois went back to learning how to use the Macintosh, a task which, among other things, involved spending an entire day trying to figure out how to make three columns on the page.

About a week after Lois' arrival, she and Kari, Bonnie, Lynne, and Margaret stood in Ralph's backyard, drinking coffee, eating cherries off the tree, and having a lovely time.

"Now," said Lois, "we've got about 1,200-1,500

pages to produce and about 20 days to do it. That means that we have to typeset, proofread, correct, and paste up at least 50 pages a day in order to get this thing done on time. Can we do it?" She intended it as a serious question.

The women looked at each other. "I don't know. What do you think?" "Maybe." "Well, I guess so...." This, despite the fact that a week had gone by and they had yet to produce even one "camera-ready" page.

### Curriculum vortex

By the end of May, the curriculum had become a whirling vortex which sucked in anyone who came too near. First it got Margaret. No sooner had she finished shipping *Songs for a Gospel People* than she got plunked down in front of a computer. Kari, already working in production, helped out whenever she had time between other book projects. Before long, Bonnie, Lynne and Norah were all spiraling into the curriculum's grasp. By the time the new PageMaker page layout software arrived, no one had time to learn it, so the women conscripted Ralph.

As the hours and demands upon them grew, the staff began to help each other with domestic chores in an effort to free as many hands for the curriculum as possible. Lynne became a "nanny" for Lois' son Brian. She picked him up from school and stayed with him through many evenings. On his birthday, she baked and decorated several dozen cupcakes as party treats. Bonnie and Kari spent a day cleaning the Milton house so that Ralph could continue working on the computer. The staff thought of these tasks as just part of the longer list of chores.

Even had everything else remained on schedule, the new laser printer which would print final pages didn't arrive until June 27. They would be lucky to finish by the end of the summer let alone the start of the Sunday school year. The first page of finished product went through the printer that same day, June 27, 1987. That left only another 1,200 or so.

By now the curriculum had taken over more

than people. It took over most of the house. It consumed everything. People, space, and most of all, time. Sometimes, time and space worked against each other. On one notable occasion, Margaret and Lois found themselves standing around at 3:00 in the morning trying to decide if they should start the photocopying they needed to do. The photocopier was in the "assembly room." The assembly room was under Ralph's and Bev's bedroom. The photocopier, specifically, stood in the corner of the room directly under their bed.

Bonnie, in her best commander's voice, solved the problem: "I'm sorry, but Ralph's and Bev's sleep will have to be interrupted. It's 3:00 a.m., and I'm not here because this is fun."

In July, Lois' mother came to stay with Brian because Lois was coming home so late in the evening and leaving so early in the morning. Two weeks later, Lois' mother left and took Brian with her; Lois brought her sleeping bag to work. During her final two-week pay period, she clocked 153 hours. The others worked equally long hours, but they lived nearby so they at least went home to sleep.

### Numbers climb and collating begins

During this production period, the phone rang constantly. People wanted the curriculum. Originally, Wood Lake placed an order with the local printer for 200 copies. By the beginning of August, they had already received 600 orders, and the number kept climbing. The printer simply couldn't handle the volume of paper involved or the work of collating it all. In desperation, Wood Lake farmed the curriculum out to almost every quick copy place in the valley. That still left the problem of collating and packing.

Fortunately, Al Semper, the original printer, was a member of First United Church in Kelowna. He wanted to see the project succeed and arranged for the rental of First United's Hall as a collating center. At that point, only Marilyn really understood how everything fitted together.

Despite the fact that she had reached total exhaustion some time previously, she began

placing the heavy boxes in the correct order around the room. Twenty-five people, including staff, their kids, friends, anyone who succumbed to reason, pleading, or tears, spent the next week endlessly circling the tables. Feet ached, and for good reason. By the time they finished, they had moved and collated 1.48 million pieces of paper by hand, and foot.

### **A testimony to dedication and commitment**

That the staff were able to accomplish what they did in the amount of time that they did it was testimony not only to their dedication to Wood Lake, but to a larger commitment. Most of them had been present earlier that spring when British Columbia Conference dedicated and used *Songs for a Gospel People* for the first time.

It was an inspiring moment. For the first time, they had a sense of being involved in something big, something important. They felt they had helped to give the church something it really needed and wanted. The high of that experience carried over into their work on the curriculum and into their continuing sense of ministry.

### **The *Whole People of God* grows into its name**

Orders continued to pour into the Winfield office. The initial print run was 850 sets of the curriculum. But the telephones kept ringing. Wood Lake spent much of the fall reprinting. They sold out in September and again in November. By the time they finished, they had mailed out 1,000 sets of the curriculum. In other words, before the first year had ended, they had virtually reached their three-year goal. Orders continued to arrive into January, but by then it was too late to reprint. They had to move on to the next years' material.

After that first year, Marilyn worked hard to reestablish the original community structure and process what had birthed the curriculum in the first place. The second year she had six writers who met six times, once for each unit. They met to discuss the biblical passages how the passages

could be lived out, and how those ideas could be written up for children.

By the end of the second year, the curriculum reached nearly 2,000 congregations and was the most widely used curriculum in the United Church. American publishers such as David C. Cook and Augsburg scurried to find out why the bottom had suddenly dropped out of their Canadian sales.

### **Anglican edition**

About 50 of those churches were Anglican. For the third year, Ralph appointed Jane Moorhouse Bourcet as editor of an Anglican edition. That first year, with Jane as the only Anglican, it remained mostly a United Church edition with a veneer of the Anglican laid over. A year later, Jane retired to have a baby and Patricia Bays replaced her as the Anglican editor. Patricia pushed for more Anglican writers and content. This change allowed the Anglican edition to become more truly Anglican.

By the end of the third year, the curriculum had reached nearly 3,000 congregations in Canada.

### **U.S. Catholic edition – Resource Publications**

During 1989-1990, Ken Guentert and Resource Publications, a small Roman Catholic publisher based in San Jose, California, had used *The Whole People of God* along with an update page which they published in their own magazine, *Modern Liturgy*. For 1990-91, they developed a Roman Catholic U.S. edition of *The Whole People of God* and published it under the name *Celebrating the Lectionary*. In creating their own edition, though, they followed the pattern of working collectively and with the rest of the writing team.

### **U.S. Protestant edition – Logos**

Also during the third year, Winfield noticed that 13 churches in Wisconsin had purchased the curriculum.

In a striking parallel to the Regina experience, a group of people from the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ had tried to write

their own curriculum. They called it *The Covenant Curriculum*. They too had worked day and night, wrestling with the lectionary passages in an attempt to develop material for their church schools.

Like the Regina group, the Wisconsin folk found the job to be bigger than they expected. They began looking around for an already developed curriculum based on the same values and concepts as their own. One of the clergy in that group got on a computer network and asked if anyone in “Computerland” knew of a similar curriculum. Dr. David Lochhead of the Vancouver School of Theology responded. Had they heard of a Canadian curriculum called *The Whole People of God*? The Wisconsin group sent for the material. After comparing it to several others, they decided that *The Whole People of God* most closely resembled their own.

On the basis of the interest The United Church of Christ people had shown in the curriculum, Wood Lake decided to advertise in the United States. The following year, 150 U.S. congregations used it. Marilyn Perry wrote a U.S. supplement that year. Realizing that it was presumptuous for a Canadian to write the U.S. supplement, Wood Lake then hired Donald Schmidt, a United Methodist minister, and Susan McKnight, a diaconal minister in the United Church of Christ, to work together to create a U.S. supplement the following year. By then the number of congregations using the curriculum had risen to 500.

In 1990, as the second stop of a longer trip during which he visited Resource Publications, Ralph met with Paul Truran and Pete Velander of Logos, an American Protestant publisher located in Minnesota. He had gone primarily to see if they might be interested in working jointly on a pulpit resource he was developing. He also sent them curriculum materials so they could see how the two could interact. Logos did not want to do the joint pulpit resource, but did want to pick up the curriculum. Donald Schmidt stayed on as U.S. editor and began travelling to Winfield to participate in the writers’ sessions.

## Australia and New Zealand edition – MediaCom

Thanks to Logos, *The Whole People of God* not only went international, it went overseas. Pete Velander of Logos already had a working relationship with Tony Nancarrow and MediaCom, a nonprofit ecumenical communications agency based in Australia. Pete passed along *The Whole People of God* to Tony. Wood Lake soon had an Australian publisher and distributor.

It was not as easy for MediaCom to pick up the curriculum as it was for Logos, however. MediaCom not only had to adapt *The Whole People of God* to a different culture, but to a different calendar. In North America, Marilyn’s writing team had developed complete lessons for September to June, with a briefer materials for the northern summer months. In Australia, the summer hiatus came over Christmas; they needed full lessons for June, July, and August.

## A United Church editor

Despite all the editions of the curriculum that now existed, Wood Lake thought of the base curriculum as a United Church of Canada curriculum. It had begun in The United Church, and had, in Marilyn, a United Church person as Editor. The United Church national offices, however, thought different. *The Whole People of God* did not have an “official” United Church presence at any level of its creation. This was unacceptable, they argued, considering that the curriculum was used by 80 percent of all United Churches.

Two years of intense negotiation resulted in the Division of Mission in Canada appointing Meg Jordan as its official representative on the curriculum team. In the summer of 1992, she joined Marilyn as co-editor of the United Church base edition.

For Marilyn, the hiring of Meg represented a good decision, and an even better choice: “Meg embodied a broad diversity of gifts rarely possessed by one person. Her appointment meant that for the first time in a long time, I was no longer responsible for the whole United Church



edition. “Meg and I shared editorial duties,” said Marilyn. “We each edited three of the six units, but did it on an alternating basis. For the first time in a long time, I could slow down and explore other interests.”

### The secret of its success

Views differ as to why the curriculum has been so popular. Marilyn credits its ecumenical agenda. Certainly ecumenical participation and interest has remained high. In Canada alone, the curriculum has found a home within Mennonite Brethren, Baptist, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and United Church congregations. Some of those groups, the Baptists in particular, wrote their own supplement when a full-fledged denominational edition was not possible.

Marilyn also attributes the curriculum's success to its commitment to community. The curriculum continued to be a community project which grew out of the shared wisdom of its United Church of Canada, Anglican, United Methodist (U.S.), and Roman Catholic (U.S.) writers.

Jim talked about its cultural or ethnic uniqueness; that it came out of a small town ethos. He believed that any curriculum with a small town feel and a middle of the road theology would appeal to the same markets, even without the ecumenical commitment.

The *Whole People of God* had begun to reflect an ethnic awareness in another sense as well. When Marilyn first realized that identifiable ethnic groups had begun using the curriculum she thought, “Oh great. We’re going to go down in history as the people who imposed our culture with our faith.” To prevent that from happening, the curriculum team had remained sensitive and openly responsive to ethnic concerns. Native Canadian and Korean groups, to name two, were claiming and shaping the curriculum to reflect their own ethnic identity and needs. Native Canadian communities have begun using it, working to insert their own examples, their own images, their own stories. A Korean congregation

in Toronto – under the leadership of Rev. Kay Cho and with Division of Mission funding – translated the information packs for the parents into Korean characters and sent them to all the Korean churches across Canada.

Other factors which have contributed to its on-going popularity may be found in some of the leadership patterns within Sunday schools themselves. Certainly having additional material helps keep the lessons fresh to its teachers. But the teachers themselves may be staying in their jobs for shorter periods of time. Gone are the days when one person would teach a Primary Class, for example, year after year after year. As the teachers themselves come and go or rotate through, each new batch of teachers experiences the curriculum as something new and exciting.

### Moving worship into new territory

Whatever the secret of its success, *The Whole People of God* changed the way thousands of church people in Canada and beyond think about Christian education. Martyn Sadler’s review of *The Whole People of God* curriculum, which appeared in the January 1992 issue of *Touchstone* magazine, states: “When the liturgical history of The United Church of Canada in the 1980s is written it may be said that the two major influences which moved worship into new territory were *Songs for a Gospel People*, and *The Whole People of God* Sunday School curriculum.”

While the nature of this “new territory” and change may also be open to debate and interpretation, the impact of the curriculum on the little company called Wood Lake was immediate and obvious.

# Simple and Easy to Use: The Structure of Whole People of God

## The full-featured curriculum.

Based on the Revised Common Lectionary, *Whole People of God* includes weekly age-level lessons as well as worship resources for clergy.

One license grants your church access to ALL of the age-level and worship materials.

Priced especially for small congregations License fees are based on the average Sunday attendance of your congregation.

A whole year of resources – from Sep 3/2017 to Aug 26/2018. The “Year at a Glance” chart with theme titles can be downloaded from the website. Unit resources and lectionary focus scripture charts are posted approximately 6 weeks prior to the unit start date beginning with Unit 1 (Sep 3/2017).

Based on the Revised Common Lectionary - helps link worship and education. The same themes flow through both the worship and lesson materials each week.

***The Whole People of God curriculum works very well for our classes. We are small and only have one class to cover all ages. The curriculum has so many suggestions that we can draw on that we always have good choices for what is appropriate for a particular Sunday. The curriculum is very versatile. – Carole Enwright, Sunday School teacher, Bethany Christian Church, Detroit, MI***

Simple and easy-to-use – all of the worship resources and age-level lesson plans are organized by Unit and date, and are accessible 7 days a week at [www.wholepeopleofgod.com](http://www.wholepeopleofgod.com).

Flexible – one person orders and then adds up to 18 leaders from the congregation as required. Everyone has access to everything on the site – excellent for churches with varying needs.

No wasted paper – download only what you need from the website. The activity sheets are reproducible for the number of children or participants on any Sunday.

Ongoing ideas & support – register for the free email “Tip of the Week,” short messages that give you extra ideas for connecting the materials to current events.

Resources for one year are divided into 6 Units (September to May) plus a Summer Session (June to August).

## UNITS INCLUDE

- Overview Chart
- Attendance Chart
- Introduction
- Unit Logo
- At Home Leaflet
- Teacher Training
- Teaching Pictures – one set of colour teaching pictures for one younger class (N, B, P) and one older class (J, Y) are included as part of your order OR if you purchase a license with printed pictures you can choose to download the Teaching Pictures and print them yourself (formatted for 8.5" x 11" printing – colour recommended)
- Lectionary Bookmarks
- Intergenerational Worship ideas for special Sundays
- Weekly resources
- (N) Nursery – age 3

- (B) Beginner – age 4 to 6
- (P) Primary – age 7 to 9
- (J) Junior – age 9 to 11
- (Y) Youth – age 12 and up

## SUMMER SESSION INCLUDES

- Overview Chart
- Introduction
- Unit Logo
- Intergenerational Worship ideas for special Sundays
- Weekly resources for a Multiage class

## WEEKLY RESOURCES INCLUDE

- Biblical Background and Theme Conversation
- Additional Worship Resources
- Lesson Plans with hymn suggestions, prayers, songs, liturgies, many experiential activity ideas, reproducible activity/resource sheets, teacher resource sheets, and colour teaching posters.

## LESSON PLANS FOLLOW THE PATTERN OF:

1. Purpose
2. Preparation
3. Opening
4. Introducing the Theme
5. Exploring the Theme
6. Integrating the Theme
7. Closing

**Whole People of God has revitalised several churches in the UK in their Sunday ministry among children. I love the fact that there is good biblical and theological background each week, thus deepening the knowledge and understanding of adult leaders. – Revd Mary Hawes, St Mary with St Alban,**

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