

## **From 'one offs' to an integral part of school life -establishing Godly Play at St Mary's School, Sheffield**

Godly Play is now an important part of St Mary's Church of England School in Sheffield, giving opportunities to nurture the spiritual development of all the children as well as enhancing the R.E. curriculum.<sup>1</sup> But it has taken 5 years to get to where we are now.....

In 2009 the school sent two classroom assistants on a 3 day Godly Play course but there was no structure in place for how Godly Play would be delivered. For the next 3 years Godly Play was done occasionally (about once a term) with the classes that they assisted. They were also sometimes released to do a story for other classes in KS2 at Christmas and Easter.

In 2011 a parent at the school went on a 3 day Godly Play course. She, along with another Mum, who was a doorperson, delivered Godly Play sessions once every half term to a class. As with the classroom assistants, there was no whole school plan for Godly Play.

In Spring 2012, under a new Head teacher, a meeting was set up to discuss how Godly Play could be incorporated in a planned way to enhance the RE curriculum and the spiritual development of the children. It was attended by the new coordinator of RE (who was very supportive of Godly Play) and members of the two local churches. Space at the school was limited and it was decided to designate the unused area in the church sanctuary as a Godly Play space<sup>2</sup>. The area was carpeted and set up with a focal shelf and response materials. The other stories would be added as they were introduced. By this time it was not possible to release the classroom assistants to help with the delivery; the storytellers and door people would be trained volunteers from the two churches, headed up by the parent from the school.

An evening INSET on Godly Play was given to all the staff and an information sheet about Godly Play, highlighting the role of the staff, was given out to all staff<sup>3</sup>.

The school followed the Blackburn Scheme and the stories were chosen to fit in with this syllabus.<sup>4</sup> This meant that each class was given 'one off' Godly Play sessions once or twice a term. In September 2012 the programme of Godly Play sessions began at St Mary's Church. Each Godly Play session lasts 90 minutes so that the story, wondering, response, prayers and feast can all be incorporated.

In September 2013, after a year of doing 'one offs' with each class the programme was changed so that each class now experienced a block of Godly Play over half a term (as per the timetable below). The teachers now trusted the Godly Play process and had seen the benefits for their classes so were willing for the Godly Play to be more loosely associated with the RE syllabus. Each block was delivered by the same storyteller and doorperson to strengthen the relationship with the class. A circle of the church year wall hanging was made for the school hall (and was being used each week) and the Godly Play team began to help with some of the collective worship to make stronger links between Godly Play and the rest of school life.

In September 2014 the Head teacher asked if the team could lead two twilight sessions... one for the staff to experience Godly Play for themselves (there were a number of new staff) and another to lead a workshop on the spirituality of childhood. Godly Play was now viewed as an important element of the curriculum with an approach that overlaps with Philosophy for children and TASC. Godly Play was recognised as having an impact on teaching and learning, for instance in children valuing each other's opinions and in teachers giving autonomy to children.<sup>1</sup>

### What has been learned through this process?

Although the school paid for two teaching assistants to attend the 3 day training this only resulted in Godly Play sessions being delivered in an ad hoc way. For Godly Play to be used more effectively it was necessary to have an advocate of Godly Play within the school.

The setting up of the Godly Play space, and the delivery of the sessions was the responsibility of the two local churches, who viewed this as a way to serve the local community. The key to success was the churches working together. In the end, this particular school was not able to support the project financially in the buying of resources or to release the classroom assistants to deliver any of the sessions. The financial support came from the church.

Although the Godly Play was initially timetabled to fit in with the RE syllabus, once the school trusted the Godly Play method, they were happy to change to a programme where each class is given a block of six Godly Play sessions every year. This results in a much greater depth of wondering and response from the children because they can connect the stories together and because they are more familiar with the elements of Godly Play.

It has been very important that the teachers understand the principles behind Godly Play and their role in the sessions (which is essentially to enjoy observing the children and allow the storyteller and doorman to manage the space). This has been done through staff training and distributing an information sheet.<sup>3</sup>

Kathryn Lord

### Plan for the delivery of Godly Play at St Mary's School from 2013

	Stories	Half term
Year 1	The Holy family Creation The Flood Baptism The circle of the church year	Winter 1 <sup>st</sup> half
Year 2	The parable of the good shepherd World communion Advent (4 sessions)	Winter 2 <sup>nd</sup> half
Year 3	The Great family Exodus Ten Best Ways Ark and the tent Ark and the temple Exile and Return	Spring 1 <sup>st</sup> half
Year 4	Mystery of Easter Faces of Easter (4 sessions) Synagogue and Upper room	Spring 2 <sup>nd</sup> half
Year 5	The Pearl The Mustard seed The Good Samaritan The Good Shepherd The Leaven	Summer 1 <sup>st</sup> half
Year 6	Jesus and the twelve Pentecost The story of a Saint Parable of the deep well Jonah Great Family (used as a transition story for moving up to secondary)	Summer 2 <sup>nd</sup> half

<sup>1</sup> [Getting the adult out of the way to promote the spiritual development of the child](#) is a case study of Godly Play sessions at the school

<sup>2</sup> [Godly Play space in the sanctuary of St Marys Church](#) shows a photo of the space

<sup>3</sup> [Godly Play information for teaching staff](#) is the information sheet given to staff at the school whenever their classes do Godly Play.

<sup>4</sup> [Blackburn scheme with Godly Play stories](#) gives details of how Godly Play stories can fit with the scheme