

*taking childhood spirituality seriously*

# Godly Play<sup>UK</sup>

**Associates of Godly Play UK**

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Editor: Rebecca Nye

## At the threshold

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Since the last issue at the beginning of March, lives everywhere have been impacted by such a lot. Clearly the coronavirus pandemic presents an awful threat to our physical health. Simultaneously, lockdown has shut us off from a lot of taken-for-granted social and emotional sources of support (school, extended family, work). On top of this, there is significant moral pain to be faced too: those responsible for impossible healthcare decisions are said to be suffering from ‘moral injuries’ and everyone, everyone is called to face up to the moral injustice of racism, embedded in the pathology of our culture. Where then does spirituality, specifically childhood spirituality, fit in? Standing at these vulnerable edges (thresholds) of our physical, emotional, moral and cultural health, could we become better able to see, hear and feel like a child?

Perhaps we can come closer to the way childhood involves fully feeling the existential issues that frame being alive, and having to search for a language rich enough to communicate and explore them. Perhaps we can re-tune ourselves onto the child’s wavelength, which picks up that language for the ‘really big things’ is a bit like a game, where we imaginatively name this experience ‘x’ and explain this feeling as ‘y’ and that consequence or behaviour ‘z’. We’ll need that kind of childlike perspective and humility to grapple with the enormity of things right now, and tentatively and creatively to tease out ways forward.

Whatever you are carrying right now, I hope you can put that down for a while to read this. Under the circumstances my aim had been to just ‘do what we could’ with this issue. But the response to invitations to write about children’s experience of the pandemic, using Godly Play during lockdown, children, racism and more has been quite incredible! I’m sure, like me, you will be inspired by every single item.

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## Into a new normal

### News of our work during lockdown

*By Gill Ambrose*

*Gill is Chair of the Godly Play UK Trustees*



The last six months has been challenging for us all, without exception. As an organisation, Godly Play UK has had to examine very carefully who we exist for, what we exist for and how we might continue to do our work in quite a different world.

All face-to-face training has been cancelled, and effectively will not resume for the rest of the year. We generally work in a hands-on, intimate way, with small groups of people working closely together. Socially distanced face-to-face courses seem a remote possibility for some time to come.

### An instant response

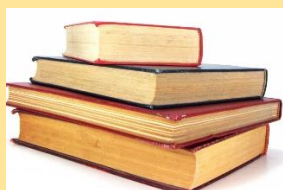
Nevertheless, work has not stopped. Trustees have met electronically twice and Sheila, our Administrator, is constantly in touch with enquirers. It is encouraging, too, that several of our network groups have found ways to meet electronically to tell stories and to encourage and support each other.

Trainers have gathered very regularly on Zoom to dream, think and plan. You may have seen the resources that were produced to help families reflect over the period of Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, which remain on our website. These were developed pretty-well instantly, as the world shut down. Other trainers have built up a real expertise in delivering Godly Play via Zoom and Facebook Live, and you can see evidence of several such experiences on our Facebook Group. We have offered a set of guidelines for doing this, including advice about safeguarding considerations.

But finding ways to offer quality training online in a sustainable way has been a top developmental priority. Here are some of the offers that will be available shortly.

## Introduction by Zoom!

Six trainers have been meeting to work out how to use Zoom to introduce people to Godly Play. This will be through an initial full Godly Play experience advertised as a personal retreat. Following that, participants will be offered the chance to sign up for an Introduction to Godly Play over three weekly Zoom sessions. Numbers will be limited to seven participants. In this way we hope to offer a safe, authentic experience of Godly Play with time for community building and personal response within the constraints of the technology.



## Book Club

Book Club aims to bring together a group of people with similar interest and experience of Godly Play, for the purpose of forming a community of support and encouragement. The medium for this will be the discussion of a book over a period of six weeks, with the provision of wondering questions to reflect upon during the week, a more personal question specific to each chapter, and plenty of laughter! Some pioneers are trying this out at present, and it should be on offer in the autumn.

## Three days

We are looking for a way to offer something like the three-day courses that have been our core work for so long. But it is clear that three solid days sitting in front of a webcam and computer screen is not viable and something more spread out will be required. And we will not be training for the old world, but for a new and emerging situation that is not yet fully clear. Watch this space – or rather, watch our website and Facebook Group for news.



## Support for school collective worship

Children have been impacted in a variety of ways by the lockdown experience, and as an organisation with a core message of ‘taking children’s spirituality seriously’ we are developing ways, in partnership with others, to support children themselves, together with their families and teachers, to talk about and reflect on their experiences. When children return to school for the autumn term, they

will be confined to class bubbles, and whole school collective worship will not happen. To help with addressing this, Rebecca Nye and Elisabeth Sutcliffe have created a partnership between the Church Schools of Cambridge charity and Godly Play UK to develop eight acts of class collective worship (one each week for half a term), each with a different focus relevant to children’s experiences of the coronavirus pandemic and their return to school. An open, reflective style invites children of all faiths and none to take part on their own terms, and the sessions are designed to help children consider their losses and their joys, their worries and their hopes. The resources will support teachers to provide a meaningful time and space for children to reflect creatively on their experiences and emotions, both as individuals, and as a class community. You can find these at <https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Collective-Worship-Autumn-2020.pdf>. All



this will be supported by a short training video to help build confidence for teachers who may never had led collective worship before.

## Meaningful time and space

Three Godly Play UK trainers have worked to put together some simple image-based reflection opportunities with the well-rehearsed wondering questions that can be used at home, at school, as another basis for collective worship or in PSHE lessons, in fact anywhere that children are encouraged to reflect and make meaning of their experiences. Another offer will be a very simple way to reflect at the end of the day, using some stones and a bowl of water, that can be used by people of any faith or none. This will be demonstrated by a tiny video available on our website and on Facebook.

## A huge thank you to you, our Associates

We are immensely grateful to all our wonderful, supportive Associates whose contributions have helped to underwrite all this unforeseen and demanding work. Godly Play UK, and Godly Play Scotland, like so many organisations, have lost all their income this year, and reinventing yourself, even if you do not need to leave the house, bears considerable costs. We have been really blessed by the support of our Associates when we needed it most. We are not doing what we had thought we would be doing, but we are proud to be able to pioneer for an emerging situation where taking childhood spirituality seriously is going to be just as important as ever.

## What story do I tell during a time of crisis?

*By Peter Privett*

*Before we dive into the substantial main articles in this issue, here is some timely practical advice from Peter Privett responding to a frequently asked question. Peter has more than 20 years' experience of Godly Play, and has helped introduce Godly Play to many other countries. He has recently taken up the role of 'Lead Trainer', guiding the new projects our trainers are engaged in.*



Whenever there is a 'situation', a problem or crisis, Godly Play practitioners are tempted to ask themselves 'What might be right story to tell?' Over the past months of the COVID pandemic and in the light of the anti-racism protests this kind of question is likely to have been on many minds. The question probably comes from a deep desire to help your group to give voice to their concerns, and to make some meaning from the crisis.

Some people like to answer this question by identifying a list of various 'relevant' Godly Play stories. However, I would like to suggest an alternative approach, taking us back to some core Godly Play principles.

## Openness

A core principle in Godly Play is the intention to be open: openness to the group, openness in one's self and openness to God. This is so easy to write but I find it is one of

the hardest things to do. Being open to that which is not me takes effort and time. Trying to put aside my own needs and being present to another, demands practice and the ability to be self-reflective. The debrief process at the end of a session between Doorperson and Storyteller is an ideal opportunity for a self-reflective process.

## Allowing participants space to make meaning for themselves

If the leaders can begin to create a sense of openness in themselves, then perhaps their needs can be put to one side so that they can focus on members of the group. So one response to the 'which story?' question is to ask the group to choose the story they might like today. However, that requires fluency and flexibility in storytelling, and a presumption that you might be working in a well-resourced space.

Alternatively, you might just tell the story you'd already planned, or any story that you are comfortable with. I've often found that if people want to make connections, it doesn't matter what the stimulus is. Being open and really listening is what is important, whereas choosing a particular story implies an urge to predetermine responses, or the learning you want to achieve, infringing the principles of giving space and being open.

## Freedom to engage or not – Trust and Silence

There can be a strong desire for leaders to know what is going on inside participants' minds. However, one of the great things about Godly Play is that there may be moments of great insight, and others where it appears that nothing is going on. Being able to hold an open space is key. We should consider the possibility a group might most need the freedom not to engage with the big problem. Godly Play can offer a sanctuary, a hospitable space where the participants can decide for themselves what needs to be done. A participant can ask, 'Am I trusted here? Is silence OK?'

## Godly Play is a whole process

It's always important remember that Godly Play is more than a story-telling process. Sometimes, perhaps especially in a crisis, what participants might most need is not a story, but another part of the process. Perhaps being greeted with attention does the work. It might be that free response, which has nothing to do with the story, is what is most needed. Enjoying some food together or even being blessed may be enough for that day.



## It takes time

There is often a desire to sort problems quickly. But deep down I know that there are no quick and easy answers. What I think Godly Play is offering is time, time, time. Godly Play offers space and time to lay foundations. You cannot rush the offering of resources and processes. It takes time to be comfortable with these, to internalize them. But over time there will be rich Godly and Playful resources to face the crisis of being alone, having or

lacking freedom, experiencing death in its many forms, or asking questions about the meaning and purpose of existence.

So, to the initial question, 'What story do I tell during a time of crisis?', here are my answers in summary:

So, don't worry which story to tell. Trust the whole process. Be open to the group. Do Godly Play to the best of your ability.

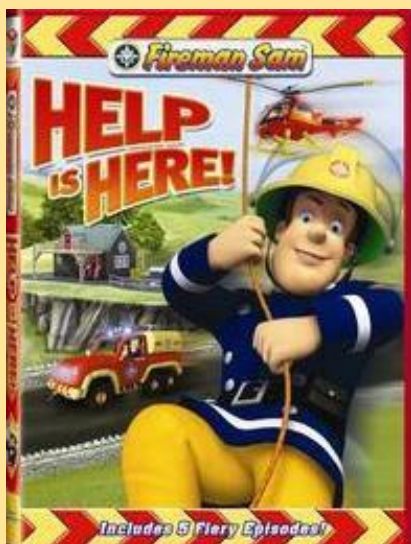
## Feature Articles

### Children, Spirituality and the Coronavirus

*By Anne Richards and Susie Steel*

*The two-part article below combines the reflections of Anne Richards, (Church of England's National Adviser for Mission Theology, New Religious Movements and Alternative Spiritualities and Godly Play UK Trustee) and Susie Steel (Godly Play Trainer). Anne's work brings her into contact with people asking all manner of spiritual questions, whilst Susie has particular concern for children with adverse childhood experiences. They consider whether distinctive spiritual needs and questions may arise for children, and why the values and practices of Godly Play can guide our response.*

#### *Fears, anxiety and grief*



Connor is 2 years old. One of his parents is a keyworker on shift work, the other furloughed. Their house is hot, both in terms of temperature and emotion. As evening approaches, his parents bicker, then argue. Money. Childcare. Food. Connor goes and gets his mum's phone. Finds a video on YouTube: *Fireman Sam*. He watches, but he also glances at his parents and in a lull, goes to show them. Watch!

Fireman Sam puts out fires. When adults are shrieking and everything goes up in flames, he pours cooling water and restores equilibrium. There is always a disaster, people panic and call for help. And then Sam and his crew come round and restore normality. You just have to hang on, endure the fear and watch to the end.

And what often causes all these fires? A very naughty boy called Norman, who always has to say sorry.

Throughout the period of lockdown, I have had a huge number of enquiries from spiritual seekers about the pandemic and their fears, anxiety and grief. At the back of many of these enquiries are concerns about children but I don't always hear or see what the children have to say. But there are glimpses. In Zoom meetings, I have seen children of various ages use their parents' distraction to raid the fridge, throw a broken toy or homework into the bin, retrieve phones or laptops, or jackets and silently slide from the room, taking advantage of the lack of scrutiny for a few minutes. Others are clearly carers for scratchy parents, quietly bringing glasses of water or coffee. I found a Tweet from a colleague particularly poignant, when his young son said: 'I'm sorry you have such an irritating job, dad'. Children get to see their parents at work and to see the complexity of relationships, authority and interaction.

In the first phase of lockdown adults asked questions about God and evil which boiled down to, 'Will I die and did I deserve this?' But children tend to frame it differently: 'Will I die – and did I make this happen?' Like naughty Norman, children are more ready to

ascribe agency to themselves, to see themselves as players unleashing forces they cannot control.



Adults also contacted me about cures and prophylactics in the early phase of lockdown, some completely irrational, some downright dangerous, but children I have encountered again put it differently, 'can I make this better?', 'can I help mum when she has a meltdown?'

Adults then went on to 'blame-believing': this situation must be someone's fault. Children, in contrast, are much more likely to assume blame. One parent told me that their child was refusing to come out of his bedroom to 'appease' whatever supernatural agency had caused his parents to be grounded. He assumed that he must have been spectacularly bad to cause this punishment to extend to his whole family, but was unable to find a way to expiate whatever unknown sin he had committed and just become 'stuck'.

Since then, I have started to receive experience-based stories and testimonies and some of these include parents talking about their children. Some are having night terrors and vivid dreams; others report seeing angels, or hearing music and bring messages of comfort or peace to their families. Children have gone past drawing rainbows and created new, imaginative ideas about hope. You only have to look at JK Rowling's drawing competition for the Ickabog (<https://www.theickabog.com/competition/>) to see the range and extent of spiritual engagement with existential questions and the current crisis.

On the other side of this, we should pay close attention to children's spirituality as it further develops. We have hardly noticed, but they have become problem solvers, bearers of burdens, sponges of grief and messengers of God. Who knows if Fireman Sam goes home at night and cries. They do.

## *How might Godly Play help?*

I wonder what these children might really need?



Anne speaks of these children taking on great burdens of worry; wondering if this pandemic is their fault, wondering how to fix it all.

I have recently been thinking a lot about what it might be like for children right now. Some have had a lovely time with their families, but many have not. Due to the rise in abuse and neglect

during lockdown, the number of children being taken into care has risen by 50%. Experiences such as this, or even just living in a home where the adults are constantly stressed can be traumatic.

I have been wondering about how schools and churches could learn a lot about how to be trauma-informed from Godly Play. Relationship, love, routine, ritual, predictability, calm spaces, wondering together, free expression, clear boundaries, a strong sense of



story and ‘my story’ are all very healing, calming and enabling aspects of a trauma-informed approach. Godly Play has them all. A Godly Play room is a safe space, where you can laugh, cry, or just be – it is for you. The doorperson welcomes you by name and connects with you for a moment as you enter the room. The restful space and the presence of the storyteller helps you to be calm as you are welcomed to build or re-build relationship. The ritual and rhythm of the session reassures you that you know ‘how it goes’. The story might be new, or it may be one you know in your heart. The wondering accepts you as you are now, even if things not great. And the response is for you, no-one else. This can be hard the first few times, but once you realise that really, truly that you can do anything in this time; it is freeing. Feast time may have to be on hold for now, but sharing food together is a natural way to build community and a time to be thankful. Transitions such as the dismissal and blessing are part of the pattern, the routine that makes you feel safe.

This gentler, playful, more child-centred approach has the potential to hold our traumatised children safely and lovingly as they walk through this ‘place of danger’.

## Wondering and Responding through a Pandemic

*Here is another two-part, two-author article. First Michelle Brown, a Godly Play Scotland Trainer, reflects on the contrasting challenges of being a Godly Play practitioner and a parent during lockdown, and her increased awareness of her children’s spirituality. Then we hear from Catherine Rennie who has been experiencing Michelle’s Godly Play Zooms, and how this ‘worked’ for her children and nurtured her own spirituality.*

### The Storyteller’s story

*By Michelle Brown*

On the last Sunday our church was open before lockdown, I packed several Godly Play stories I thought might help my young children in the uncertain time ahead. My nine-year-old had previously said to me, ‘If only there was a Godly Play story for this, then I could understand it better.’ At the time, Ben was referring to trying to understand the book of Revelation as he read it in his Brick Bible, but I suspected his sentiment could apply to current events as well.



As we approached the first Sunday not at church, two parents messaged me asking if there was any way Godly Play could be shared with their children as both felt it was what their children needed. I had a quick crash course in Zoom and lots of safeguarding discussions and planning meetings with fellow storytellers to determine the best practice and then we just jumped into it, ready to learn as we went. Relationships are at the heart of Godly Play and providing space for our church circle to connect was what would matter most that week, so I felt that if all we did was build our circle, then that would be Godly Play. However, as we gathered, the circle was ready to begin and wanted a story.

At the time of writing this, we have shared fifteen stories in this new way. Godly Play on Zoom has surprisingly been a rich experience. It is different and the biggest difference for us is that parents are now part of our circle. While it appears to be working, I worry that it works most for the families on the other side of the screen and less positive for my own



children. At church I wear the two hats of Family Worker and Mum, and my children are often part of the circle when I'm storyteller. However, in this new way of Godly Playing, I'm also wearing the hat of Zoom operator and looking at a screen to engage with the circle whilst two people in our circle are physically present watching me look at others.

It is the biggest challenge for me to juggle parenting, storytelling and Zoom operating in a way that I feel fully present in any of those roles. My nine-year-old has coped remarkably well, but my four-year-old is finding new and exciting ways to turn the Zoom attention back to her and thus my attention too. For example, recently I told the Exile and Return and as I finished describing the dangerous desert, EJ appeared next to me, having retrieved her plastic shovel and bucket from the cupboard, and she began to play in the desert. My husband moved the camera closer to the story as I told it with my right hand while my left arm cuddled my daughter and carefully removed plastic toys from the sand.

When our Godly Play session closes and everyone logs off, my husband and I take a collective sigh of exhaustion and wonder if our two have had any connection to the session at all. However, I need to trust the process more and trust that God works through everything. My two don't appear to be taking it in on a Sunday morning, but then during the week when we're out walking, both of my children will randomly bring up the story from the week or general wondering about God. Their response comes out as the week goes on. It is never immediate, but if I slow down and pay attention, it is there in their play or the things they draw or in their Lego creations. I do think that for both of my children Godly Play in lockdown is less about Godly Play sessions and more about pausing and appreciating God in the everyday.



One of my favourite memories is walking with EJ one night. She hopped off her scooter and jumped onto the soft grass on the side of the path. She patted the grass and insisted I sit down with her. 'Let's take a break mum. I just want to stop and feel the grass.' She told me how we don't get to enjoy the grass enough and she wanted to just be there for a while. We wondered about this grass and what a gift it was. We had similar chats at the beach collecting shells and jumping the tide. Her moments of childhood spirituality and pausing to be in them with her are where I see most my Godly Play training and experience interacting with our lockdown experience. These are also the moments of lockdown when I have felt closest to God personally and I have been able to worship.

## Unlocking Godly Play in Lockdown

*by Catherine Rennie*

These past few months, I feel very lucky to have been able to take part in Godly Play sessions each Sunday morning. This isn't the first time I had seen Godly Play in action but, locked down at home with my family with no church service to attend and no duties to fulfil other than 'mother', I have experienced the stories in a completely new way.

In the first two weeks of March, our whole household was reeling from the shock of what was happening. Emotionally, we were all over the place, children and adults alike. When I heard that Michelle, our church Family and Youth Ministry worker would be running Godly Play over Zoom each week I was relieved to be able to schedule something familiar into our weeks. However, the first two or three sessions we joined were really tough. My nine-year-old in particular seemed to have so much resentment at things being so different. We had tears, upset and anger as well as extreme discomfort at interacting over a screen. It is safe to say that we all worked through some difficult feelings in those first few sessions and I was very thankful to be able to mute our household!

As the weeks went on, things got easier. Perhaps we were getting used to the format, perhaps our emotions were all a bit less turbulent, but I suspect a big part of it was that I surrendered. I stopped trying to direct, encourage and engage my children. Instead I decided just to listen to the story myself and respond myself. I hoped the children would want to join in but I wasn't going to insist. This was a shift for me – I had helped out at Godly Play sessions at church in the past, setting out craft supplies and supporting the children in their crafts and response time, but I had never simply taken part before.

Spending time with the stories in this way allowed me, as an adult, to connect with them in a way I had not anticipated. Michelle told the Faces of Easter story week by week and I found being able to revisit, repeat and build on each tile as the weeks passed was especially meaningful. The repetition and familiarity from previous weeks somehow allowed me to listen less and hear more. I found myself responding in different ways each week; filling a sketchbook with drawings, thoughts and words. Most weeks both my children decided to join in and I have been totally fascinated to see their responses each week. We are, of course, at home and although we are part of a group over Zoom, we are also in our own private space, uninterrupted during our response time. This has allowed us to share our responses together when we want to and every week I am amazed at the differences in our responses to the same story.



Michelle has been thoughtful about finding the best way to tell the stories over Zoom. Her husband acts as her camera operator and thanks to him we are able to watch the story unfold just as we might if we were sitting in the circle. My son likes to be in charge of pinning her storytelling screen when the story begins so we can watch just the story without distractions from other screens. Michelle has also managed to foster calm and respectful communication in our sessions and the children are generally very good at taking turns speaking and

muting/unmuting themselves appropriately. (This is in contrast to other Zoom meetings I have seen between my kids and their friends where listening and interacting very much takes second place to making lots of noise and funny faces at each other!)

It is true to say that 'virtual' Godly Play at home is not at all the same as Godly Play as a group in our church building. However, it is also true to say that it is not any less rich an experience. My experience has given me a renewed appreciation for and a deeper understanding of the Godly Play approach but has also allowed me to share the wondering and response time with my children. I am so thankful for this time and these insights and I look forward to our sessions every week.

# When Godly Play goes zoom

## Inspiration for the new normal

*By Kathryn Lord*

*In this article Kathryn Lord draws on her extensive experience as a trainer in Sheffield to share her practical discoveries about using Godly Play in new ways during lockdown, both online and offline. As others writing in this issue also report, Kathryn has found real inspiration from the ways these circumstances can help us to appreciate what's at the heart of Godly Play.*



Over the past 13 years I have enjoyed and promoted Godly Play because of the qualities of the face to face sessions in the sacred space of a carefully prepared environment where children can learn in a sensori-motor way. So, when I launched into sharing Godly Play online and all this was taken away I didn't know what the new place would be like - I didn't know if Godly Play would be there.

Recently when I sat down to do a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) I found that, as with many other COVID-related new ways of doing things, weaknesses can become strengths and threats can become opportunities.

I am convinced that whatever the season and context, the question we must always ask ourselves is this: 'What are the needs of this group?' This was Jerome's question when he started on his journey of finding a new model of Christian education. I have had experience (with some success and many mistakes - which I now view as learnings) in adapting the Godly Play approach to working in schools, with community groups, for church services, and for older people in care homes, including those living with dementia (Stories for the Soul). But this adaptation has been the most challenging - and the most life giving. It has taken Godly Play right out of the box and forced me to think - what is really important in Godly Play?

Online Godly Play of course requires us to make best use of the technology available. The technology can be clunky and I find I'm learning all the time. We also need to make adaptations to what we do to enable people to enter into what is being offered - at the threshold, in the circle building, story, wondering, response, feast and blessing. But I have been quite amazed to find that the same qualities - of Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy and Trust - are present in our Zoom circle as they were in our Godly Play room.

Crucial to everything, as it is in the 'normal' Godly Play space, is the door person role. The parents in our church have all experienced Godly Play for themselves and understand their role as 'door parents' - creating a space in which their children are free to play with God. Before I started the sessions, I communicated to the parents via email why I thought it was important for the children to have the stories at home and what I was hoping to offer to the children over the weeks to come. I explained to the parents why I thought Godly Play could be helpful in this time. Some parents, whilst watching the sessions from a distance, have found them spiritually nurturing for themselves.

So, what are the nuts and bolts of this online process? First, the circle is built. It feels



very special to be a guest in each other's homes. We each occupy a rectangle on the screen and we can each choose what to show in that space so that the power dynamic in fact feels more equal than in the Godly Play room. We catch up with each other and have a laugh and the children often choose to play with the virtual background options. I light the Christ candle and some children choose to light a candle in their own homes. We proclaim with words and actions "I am here, you are here, we are here together." We then pray both silently and with words - including for the friend who can't join us and whose family is having a really tough time. We then share the Feast and say the words Jesus said, 'Whenever you share bread like this I am with you' and everyone breaks the food they have with them - which might be bread, a cracker, a banana or a satsuma.

Why start with the feast? I think it helps us to get ready for the story - which is harder to do online. There's also a practical reason because the children want to leave the zoom session for their response and not have to be tied to all regathering for the Feast at the same time.

The children are invited to mute themselves and switch to Speaker view for the story. I have adapted the story materials so that the children can always see all of the story as well as my face and I have made changes such as having the parable figures standing upright so they can be seen more easily. After the story we come back together again in Gallery view to wonder. After putting the story away I say a blessing, change the light of the Christ candle and we then say goodbye before the children leave the online meeting to have their response time offline.



Now the real work can begin! Some children choose to play alone, others with siblings and others to play and chat with their parents (which is not possible in a Godly Play room). Responses have also included ways that would be impossible in a Godly Play classroom like dressing up in the colours of the rainbow (after the story of the flood). The children have been given resources for the stories like a sand bag, wooden people and

a chain but they also choose to use what they have at home, like building blocks for the tower of Babel, or they make their own materials, like birds for the parable of the mustard seed. Sometimes the wondering continues throughout the week and some children have created Holy spaces at home.

I initially included the response time as part of the Zoom session, but, at the request of the children we have moved the response time to after the session so that they can have as long as they need to play. This has inadvertently made it easier for parents to be invited by the children to join in with their response time.

And so these Christian stories are now 'at home' alongside the Lego and all the other stories that have been made over lockdown and the children have the tools to create more of their own stories. Adapting Godly Play for this online season has, in my view, been encouraging faith formation in the home, for both the children and the adults.





So I have found that Godly Play is there in this new and foreign land. I have found quality of relationships (which now include those of the parents) in an environment that the children can prepare and have agency over and in which they can play with the stories in a sensori-motor way. I am not sure if I want to go back to the "sacred space" even when the chain is removed. Yesterday I cancelled the intergenerational Godly Play session because our internet connection still hasn't been fixed and I sent this message to the Whatsapp group: 'I hope you might use this time to play! Perhaps choose a story - from the Bible or elsewhere and use an open approach to wonder about it together. Perhaps you could get out some materials to help tell the story using your senses.' Now that's Godly Play!

## The Good Shepherd is Calling

*by Mary Hunter Maxwell*

*President, Godly Play Foundation Board of Directors*

*The anti-racism protests of recent months create the need for penetrating soul-searching and change. The Godly Play movement itself has embarked on a period of reflection and action to address unconscious bias and to ensure Godly Play advocates an anti-racist viewpoint. In this first item, the president of Godly Play Foundation (based in the USA) opens up this crucial examination which clearly applies on both sides of the Atlantic.*

Prophets are people who come so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know just what God is calling them to say or do. Those of us who practice Godly Play know that prophets can be children. Inside the sacred space of a Godly Play room, children practice the Christian rhythms of silence, story, reflection, and community. When children speak in a Godly Play room, adults listen.

Listening to, observing, and honoring children is at the heart of the practice of Godly Play and of the Montessori method, where Godly Play has its roots. As a parent, an educator, and follower of Jesus, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity Godly Play has given me to be with children in this counter-cultural posture and for how much I have learned and grown through my Godly Play practice.

I am also deeply troubled by the stark whiteness of the community of Godly Play practitioners and, in particular, our leaders in the United States. I recently stepped into the role of president of the Godly Play Foundation board of directors, and it seems clear that God is calling all of us -- the board, our trainers, and the church communities that use Godly Play with their children -- into the work of anti-racism. But unlike the prophets, I do not know exactly what to say or do.

As I prayed for God to give me the words to begin to meaningfully address this issue with the Godly Play community, the image of my son, then 4-5 year old, sitting at the dinner table after a long and glorious day of playing outside in the snow came to mind.

Seemingly out of nowhere, he turned and said, 'Mama, you know the ordinary shepherd? From the story?'

'I do.'

'Well, he wasn't bad you know. He just. . . he just wasn't very good at his job. At being a shepherd.'

'Hmmm, I wonder what he could have done better?'

Immediately, he responded, 'Call the sheep by name!' After a few minutes of silence I asked him if there was anything else the ordinary shepherd could have done differently. In a tone that clearly suggested I should be able to figure this part out for myself he said, 'Ask the Good Shepherd for help.'

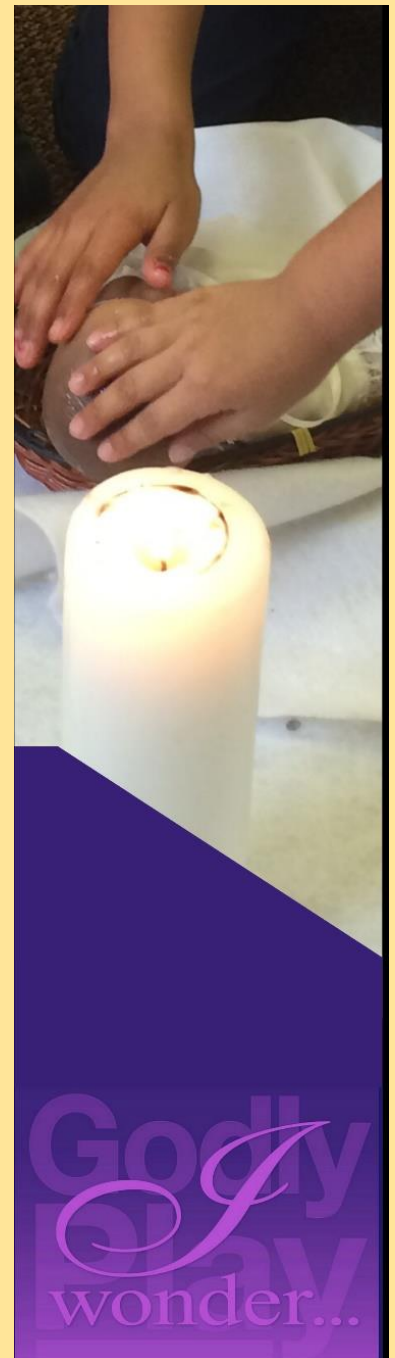
We, the leaders of the Godly Play community in the United States, have not called our Black sisters and brothers by name. We have not explicitly examined the how the culture of our organization, in ordinary ways, reflects the structures of oppression that plague our nation and undermine the Gospel message. We have operated with good intentions that are no longer good enough, and we are ready, with the Good Shepherd's help, to do better.

Our first task is to engage in a period of listening to and honoring people of color. We will likely hear some uncomfortable truths, and we might also hear that in this current moment of grief and exhaustion that the best way to honor those who have been confronting these issues their entire lives is to do our own work for now. By that, I mean take a deep dive into the anti-racism resources that are currently available, learn about how to be a white ally, and not create any additional emotional burden on the people of color in our circles as we confront the realities of racism that exist even in our most sacred spaces.

Using these resources to equip trainers, board members, and Godly Play mentors with anti-racist language is a critical component of ensuring that our circles are facilitated in a way that is consistent ideals of Maria Montessori and the Good News of Jesus.

As we take these first steps, we will also be working to update the most obviously problematic artwork in the curriculum as quickly as possible, publish six additional saints stories, beginning with Barbara Harris, and convene an anti-racism task force to identify and address additional opportunities for growth and reconciliation. Please provide your input by participating in the questionnaire linked below.

Thank you for the work you do to honor and nurture the spirituality of children. Thank you for your patience and prayers as the Godly Play Foundation moves into our next chapter. Thank you for your feedback, your commitment, and your passion for ensuring that Godly Play is not just in this place or that place, but that Godly Play can truly be in every place.



# Keeping an open mind

*By Adrian Chatfield*



*In this article Adrian Chatfield offers us his wisdom and insights about Children, Spirituality and Racism. Adrian grew up in Trinidad and Brazil, trained for ministry in England, taught Church History and Practical Theology at St John's Nottingham, Systematic Theology in Johannesburg, and Worship and Spirituality at Wycliffe Hall Oxford and Ridley Hall Cambridge. In a busy retirement he is a Trustee for Godly Play UK.*

Our two children were born in the Caribbean and came to live in England when they were eight and six. School in North Devon was of course markedly different, and very white. Our daughter, the six-year-old, came home from school one afternoon and said to her mother, 'Mummy, why is there no one my colour in my class?' Jill replied, 'But they're all your colour, darling.' We don't now remember any more than that but once we got over our amusement, we spent some time wondering how a white child could think she was black. With hindsight, I guess that she defined herself in terms of the community to which she belonged. 'My people are black,' her reasoning went, 'so I am black because I belong.'

My parents used to tell me that as a small boy, I fell into the habit of describing people as pink and brown, mostly brown, until I learned the adult words, the words that package people into categories. For myself and for our children, I remain deeply grateful and humbled by these experiences which were not experiences of diversity. Rather they were the experiences of life as it is, taken as it comes, to be explored and played with, received, interpreted and built on - to be explored in community.

Conversely, Jill was brought up in white working-class Nottingham. When after a Billy Graham crusade she brought a young black girl home for tea, her parents were meticulously polite, but said afterwards, 'You might have told us first.' Their lack of experience meant that they felt out of their depth, and there is a certain 'out of depth' feeling in many of us in the current situation.

In our grown-up world, identity has been politicized and not infrequently weaponized. The Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf speaks about 'identity-centred clashes in a rapidly globalizing world' and proffers an alternative in Exclusion and Embrace of a 'theology of embrace'. What is it about us grownups that has gone wrong?

Part of it springs out of lazy thinking. Children obviously don't know everything, know that they don't know everything, and don't make assumptions. As we grow older, we become more opinionated because we know more. The poverty of the little more that we know becomes precious to us, because it secures us in our own self, defends us against the other, and saves us from doing the hard work of engaging with those whom we do not know. In short, we create stereotypes. In this way of thinking, knowledge becomes a means to an end, whether the end is self-defence, self-enhancement or containment of a confusing world.

In my child's eye, the delight of play is that it resists this kind of instrumental thought, offering a safe space in which to explore the novel and the unfamiliar without objectifying it. The response is delight rather than defence, diversity rather than differentiation, embrace rather than exclusion. I am far from being an expert in the field of play, but am close enough at the age of 71 to my own experience of play to know that childlikeness is fundamental to keeping alive a sense of journey and adventure which does not close down flexible and creative thought but maintains an open narrative.

Grownup absolutist ways of thinking easily make friends with a particular kind of theologizing which produces cocky, self-assured religious thought that is often plain wrong. Think of apartheid theology, saying that God made us all to live in different communities according to our ethnicity; or prosperity theology, promising that we can get rich for sure by the way we pray. Thomas Traherne, the poet of childhood innocence, says this of such spiritual arrogance:



By Leon Brooks  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2482940>

When thou dost take  
this sacred book into thy hand;  
think not that thou  
th'included sense dost understand.

It is a sign  
thou wantest sound intelligence  
if that thou think  
thyself to understand the sense.

Then too, there is a large element of fear in our adult behaviour. More than one South African writer in the era of apartheid spoke of the fear of 'the barbarians', when in fact the enemy was within the walls, within the white community. The real enemy was the poisonous thought world in the minds of many of that community. A South African Methodist (black) bishop once told me of a (white) parishioner who had received the communion bread from her and wiped it on her sleeve before communicating. The fear of infection or invasion by the other. Play, on the other hand, enables the child in me to receive the unfamiliar story or object and draw it closer to me in stages, testing my own reactions in the safety of the game.

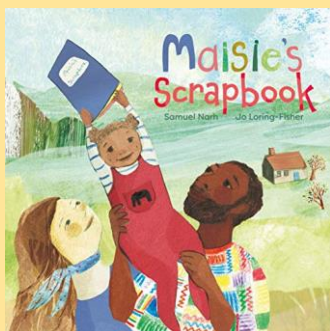
All that I have said so far contrasts the openness of childhood spirituality with adult closure, whether caused by shoddy thinking, fear or a hunger for power and control. There is a more positive way of looking at the issue of race in the light of childhood spirituality, which for me flows out of a Christian theology of beauty. Simply put, the universe is beautiful precisely because it is rich in its diversity. I was taught this as a child by my Christian parents: 'Wouldn't it be boring if everyone were the same' was a constant refrain. I'm aware now of how deeply programmed I was with this truth, aware also of how transformative this would be if it were one of the core values of our communities. In relation to Godly Play, it raises the simple question whether the materials we use communicate that 'beauty in diversity' or whether we unconsciously inculcate a narrow vision with the objects we use or the way in which we present our narratives.

I dream of a day when we will all have learned to play again, and in playing found that at heart God longs for us to live lives of celebration, of delight and of fun, to discover that God too is quintessentially 'child'.



# Taking your wondering further...

## Reviews: Books to take your wondering further...



### *Maisie's Scrapbook*

Samuel Narh, author and Jo Loring-Fisher, illustrator;  
(2019) Lantana Publishing; ISBN 978-1911373582

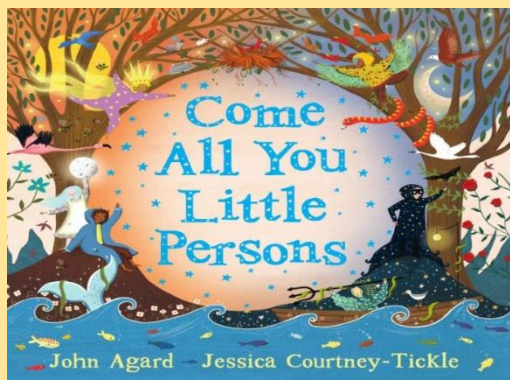
#### *A Review by Mary Cooper*

This is a delightful book about a year in five-year-old Maisie's life in her mixed-race family. It follows the family through the four seasons, celebrating the diversity and commonality of her experiences with her parents, both in outdoor adventures and the everyday. They wear different clothes, have different words for things, cook different food, play different instruments, which can together produce music. Mama's arms are the source of protection, safety and comfort. Dada tells tall tales from his African heritage, in which Maisie becomes the heroine, and he encourages her to look up to the stars and the clouds and imagine pictures there. They both love her, hug her, and affirm her in the same way.

The mixed media illustrations with variety of colour and texture are beautiful and engaging. My four year-old granddaughter loved the details and had many questions which led us into many different directions following her interests. Together we will now be finding out more about the African folk tales about Anansi the Spider and the Bull with the ring in his nose, which feature in Maisie's Dada's tall tales. Why do bulls have rings in their noses?

The end papers depict Maisie's own pictures of herself and her parents over time, promoting the idea of a scrapbook, making memories and exploring her own identity. I can see this as a jumping off point for which might well be the kind of response a child might need to make.

This book would be a very valuable addition to any family collection of books. The illustrations draw you into much wondering, it reflects the family realities of many of our children and can provoke conversation about different heritages and experiences. Classified as suitable for pre-school to 8 years, and winner of the 2019 Northern Lights Book Award in the Family Category, it is a book which will endure.



### *Come All You Little Persons*

John Agard, author and Jessica Courtney-Tickle, illustrator; (2017) Faber and Faber Limited;  
ISBN 9780571324163

#### *A Review by Mary Cooper*

This stunning book by one of the nation's renowned poets, John Agard, takes the form of a poem in a picture book. In sparse but lyrical language, it celebrates both diversity and inclusion, and the wondrous resources of the earth.

'From above earth, from above sky,  
from below earth, from under water,  
come all you little persons come exactly as you are.'

Each beautifully illustrated, double page spread invites a different child, no matter where they come from, to join in the special 'dance of Earth's guests.'

'Little persons, big persons,  
whoever you are, wherever you are...  
Come join nature's dance of life.  
There's room for everyone.'

The little sun-person, wearing her glittering tiara, meets the tiny bat-person in her starry cloak of the night. Dressed in her feathered cape, the young bird-person joins the little fish-person, whose shimmering blue coat is made of scales. The tree person, in robe of leaves, and the wave person, in shirt of spray, come with the snake person, in sheddable sleeves, and the star person in five-pointed crown, and many more.

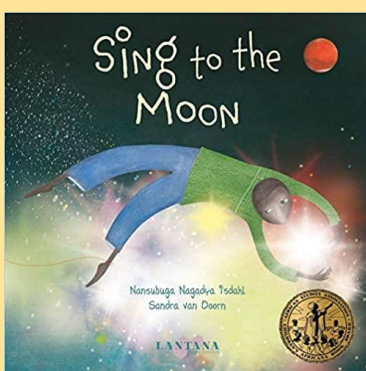
Everyone is welcome to come, dressed just as they are, from sky, sea, river, lake and forest.

The poem finishes with the words, 'Planet Earth has room for the footsteps of all.'

Jessica Courtney-Tickles' illustrations are stunning. They are full of tiny details of the place each child comes from, with beautiful colour contrasts between scenes of day and night.

My granddaughter Beatrice was immediately drawn to this book and has spent a long time drinking in the details of the illustrations. She particularly likes the final illustration which depicts all the children dancing in a circle and likes being able to name all those that feature in the book. But she especially enjoys being able to use her imagination and assign names and characters to the many extra unnamed children who have joined the dance along the way.

An absolutely lovely addition to any collection of books for a family, a group of children, or in fact anyone who loves children's literature. It is timeless, with so much detail to interest and stimulate.



*Sing to the Moon*, Nansubuga Nagadya Isdahl, author and Sandra van Doorn, illustrator; (2019) Lantana Publishing, ISBN 9781911373407

*A Review by Andrea Harrison*

'Sing to the Moon' was named as the best book for young children at the 27th Annual Children's Africana Book Awards.

The story begins with the narrator, a young Ugandan boy, full of fantastical wishes:

'I would sail on a dhow and gaze in wonder at old spice markets till the sun goes under.'

But, instead of realising his wishes, the boy awakes to a rainy day and the prospect of nothing to do. As he eats breakfast, his jjajja (grandpa) holds out his hand and invites him to 'let's go see.' What follows is a day of household daily chores - packing peas, clearing away wet bamboo leaves and cleaning fish for the stew- interspersed as jjajja shares with his grandson some childhood memories. At the day's end when the light goes, jjajja's books come out and adventurous stories are told. The pair finally go out to survey the night sky and the boy realises that 'even new worlds far away couldn't compare to this one rainy day.'

This is a beautiful story about the relationship between a child and grandparent and about creating adventure in the most ordinary of days. Told in a gentle rhyming text, with detailed, whimsical artwork, I thought it captivating, so I tried it out on a four-year-old British white boy. Like me, he has no specific knowledge of Uganda, its climate, culture, legends or traditions.

I decided to look up how to pronounce jjajja beforehand and be ready to explain what a dhow and tilapia are. The pictures are detailed and give lots of visual clues, but I anticipated the questions and they came.

The strap line for Lantana, the publisher, is 'Because all children deserve to see themselves in the books they read'. Does that mean that this is a book just for African children? No! Its themes are universal, but in its culturally specific detail, including the use of Lugandan words, the book can serve to widen any child's horizon of the world and the people who live in it. In addition, it is important for children to read a book set in Africa that is not about poverty and conflict.

My listener spent much time surveying the detail in the artwork-pineapples on top of the fridge; the funny little dog, who appears on each page; the fish bones, and asking about the boy's life. He's asked to hear it again. Recommended!

## Children, Communion and Godly Play

*by Rachel Archer*



*Often in this spot in our magazine we have an article about particular Godly Play spaces. However, in this issue, we have an article which consider the overall 'architecture' of a Godly Play session. Writing from an Anglican perspective, Rachel Archer shares some of her MA research about how children can prepare to take communion, and the potential of Godly Play to provide a particularly nurturing time and space. Rachel is a curate at St Mark's Church, Biggin Hill, Bromley.*

'How shall we sing the songs of the Lord while in a strange land?' I am sure this lyric has played through our minds as we sit and reflect on what life is now like in lockdown. Perhaps the key question is to wonder what we can leave out and still have all we need to share God's love?

For me that comes back to sharing bread and wine with one another. My two boys, from just 18 months old, would hold out their hands to receive communion in church, only to be told no, they must wait until they have been properly prepared. I have struggled with this when my journey to ordination has centred on an overwhelming yearning to break bread and share it with those I serve.

Jonny Baker, in a recent blog,<sup>1</sup> challenges those within the Anglican tradition to ‘share communion in your own home and resist the power of religious control’ drawing our attention to the simplicity of Jesus’ meal with his friends. He draws parallels with the Reformation in challenging the recent Church of England guidelines which state that only bishops and priests may share the bread and wine, whilst people at home watch. This parallels children in church: they, too, can only sit and watch whilst the priest and other adults share in the bread and wine.

In my MA dissertation, I decided to explore this area further. I knew I would want to share the bread and wine with anyone who came to the Lord’s table, but I also knew that I would be under holy orders and the Church of England’s regulations surrounding children receiving communion before confirmation.<sup>2</sup>

My research discovered that 31/41 diocesan policies on children receiving communion before confirmation, recommend preparation courses that follow a directed-learning teaching programme. In essence, these courses aim to tell children what to believe, instead of aiming to accompany children to articulate what they already know about God. This finding confirms Rebecca Nye’s assertion that many church children’s programmes do not view spiritual capacity as natural to every child’s life. Instead, they still ‘seem to treat children as spirituality empty and passive vessels until and unless adults intervene.’<sup>3</sup>

Of the remaining 10 dioceses, 9 did not recommend any course and one did not respond. Whilst 14 dioceses mentioned Godly Play on their websites, none mentioned how this might connect with preparing children to receive communion. Children’s advisers suggest that in some parishes, some connection may happen in practice, but from a diocesan policy point of view none advocates Godly Play as communion preparation.

I wanted to know why, since for me, the whole practice of Godly Play mirrors the liturgy of the Word and Sacrament. I do not think a Godly Play session even needs to have special ‘communion preparation’ stories (e.g. the Good Shepherd, World Communion, Baptism, etc). What follows sketches the parallels, as I see them, between Godly Play and the liturgy of Word and Sacrament which enable the process to be deeply formative in its own right.

At the threshold: Entering a church is an important step, taking us into a liturgical space designed to bring us close to God. A Godly Play room serves the same purpose: The appearance of the room, as well as our actions and words within the room, signal our intentions and set the expectations of those who enter.<sup>4</sup> This is a sacred space.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.jonnybaker.blogs.com/jonnybaker](http://www.jonnybaker.blogs.com/jonnybaker)

<sup>2</sup> Whilst children may now receive communion before confirmation this is subject to the bishop’s discretion. Regulation 5 provides that ‘the bishop must first satisfy himself ... that the [child’s] parish ... has made adequate provision for *preparation and continuing nurture* in the Christian life and will encourage any child admitted to Holy Communion ... to be confirmed at the appropriate time’.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Nye, *Children’s Spirituality: what it is and why it matters*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Jeanie Babb, *Sacred Space for Godly Play* <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/sacred-space-for-godly-play/#more-3361> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019.





Building the circle: The doorperson and the storyteller hold this liturgical space for children much the same as a Minister holds the space for worshippers gathering in church. It is an important task, holding the expectations, desires and hurts of a community as they gather to bring their praises and laments to God. To this end the doorperson helps the child to leave their world behind them for a time and come into a sacred place where the storyteller will help them to hear the word of God and

wonder. The storyteller, in turn, helps the child to settle into the sacred space using quiet conversation and by drawing attention to the focal shelf; as worshippers might focus on stained-glass, icons, and altar in church.

Presenting the word: With the congregation gathered and prayers said, the Bible is read. This is also true in a Godly Play session. A Bible is always open at that day's story. Godly Play at this point perhaps differs from what is happening in communion, where the worshippers are being read to. The storytelling approach invites children to enter into the story's 'larger reality where deep identity is formed.'<sup>5</sup>

Wondering: One of the guiding principles of Godly Play is that it allows children to wonder, believing that each has a relationship with God and can find meaning for themselves, rather than relying on being told what a Bible story means. I wonder what is happening in church during the sermon?

Response: In communion worshippers say the creed. The children are invited to begin their work, which may seem like a departure from the eucharistic structure. However, when it is understood that the storyteller is encouraging the children to let their work be an occasion to attend to God, listening, and reflecting on the day's story, or one from previous weeks, the parallels become clear.

Feast: Echoing the transition towards communion, children re-form the circle. This is not merely a 'snack-time' but an opportunity to build community. The same is happening in church when the altar is prepared with the bread and wine. It is here gathered around the 'communion table' that children talk about what is going on for them, learning how to be within a community that listens and supports each other.



Dismissal: Communion concludes with the sending out.

So too, in Godly Play, the children are dismissed. Each child receives a personal blessing as they leave the circle and say goodbye to the doorperson. In communion the blessing is corporate and members are sent out to continue God's mission in the world.

The shape of Godly Play is inherently related to the life of the historic Church through the communion liturgy. Children taking part in a Godly Play session are indeed being prepared to receive communion in church. And yet not one of the 41 diocesan policies advocates using Godly Play as a way of preparing children to receive communion. I wonder what needs to happen to change this? And I wonder how much more change could come from such a change?

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<sup>5</sup> Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play*, 68.

# The Feast

## A chance to meet ... An interview with Rosemary Privett



*Many Associates of Godly Play will know Peter Privett. But behind every great man there's a great woman, so in this issue we interview Rosemary Privett and hear about her 20-year journey with Godly Play and her much-appreciated contribution as a Trustee of Godly Play UK.*

### **How did you first get into Godly Play?**

Being married to Peter means that Godly Play has had a place of central importance in our household for what seems like a very long time, so it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when I first encountered it. It might be easier to share the way in which it first had an impact on me personally, rather than experiencing it second hand.

I was first bitten by the bug when serving as the Headteacher of a small Church of England primary school in rural Herefordshire in the late 1990's. My school was asked to be part of a pilot project looking at the use of Godly Play in a school setting. The effect of my involvement in this project was life changing. It was a bit like a pebble being dropped into a pond. The initial impact on both my class and me was huge, setting off many ripples of reflection, wondering and challenge, which have followed me ever since. Godly Play is sometimes regarded as being counter-cultural, but looking back on those early Godly Play sessions with my class, I am struck by just how much is shared by both the Godly Play process and what I have always regarded as enriching teaching and learning. Both have an ethos of lifelong learning at their heart. Both build relationships and fashion a space where it is OK to explore and experience vulnerability. Both enable individuals to make the connections for themselves by encouraging exploration and observation.

### **Can you tell us about something new that you've learned through Godly Play?**

As part of the school project we had to tell the lesson of the circle of the Church year. I had a big argument with Peter beforehand because I'd decided that it was a 'rubbish story' that wouldn't work with children. I had decided beforehand what the outcome would be. As I told it, a couple of boys appeared to be bored and disengaged, which seemed to confirm my instinct that it wouldn't work. How wrong I was. In the free response time, I noticed that these same boys were totally involved in developing their own circle with K'nex, making a highly complex, three-dimensional model whilst still keeping all the liturgical colours in the correct order.

The apparent disengagement of the boys taught me that there is indeed such a thing as 'disengaged engagement.' I had misinterpreted the surface signs. What I learned from that experience was the need to relinquish control. I learned to trust the process.

### **Why and when did you become a Trustee?**

I was invited to become a Trustee of Godly Play UK after retiring from my full-time job as a Diocesan Education Advisor. It was felt that my experience as a Godly Play practitioner and my experience of leadership in the field of education may be of help to the Trust. It's ironic really that I am now a member of the Trustee's finance sub-committee because

managing and monitoring budgets was the part of my Headteacher's role that I liked least. Strange how things turn out sometimes!

### **Tell us about your special areas of interest and expertise**

Through my work as a Diocesan Education Advisor and Church School Inspector, I gained experience of helping teachers grapple with the whole area of spirituality, particularly childhood spirituality. For many of them it seemed elusive, a bit of a 'slippery fish'. Experience of Godly Play in my own school allowed me to ground discussions in my practical experience. And through that, I could share the underlying principles of Godly Play, helping schools to grasp the subject of spirituality in new ways. And often I'd suggest how those principles could spill over and enhance many other aspects of teaching. I think my experience advising schools can particularly inform Godly Play UK's discussions about how best to share Godly Play with those who are new to it.

In recent years I have developed an interest in the field of spiritual accompaniment, and have just completed the first year of training to be a Spiritual Director. My training has confirmed for me that the principles of Godly Play and the ministry of spiritual direction have much in common. In both, we offer a safe, contemplative space in which we accompany others on their spiritual journey. We enable them to choose their own direction whilst supporting the explorations they wish to make. In doing so, whether with adults in spiritual direction, or children in Godly Play, we may often be touching holy ground.

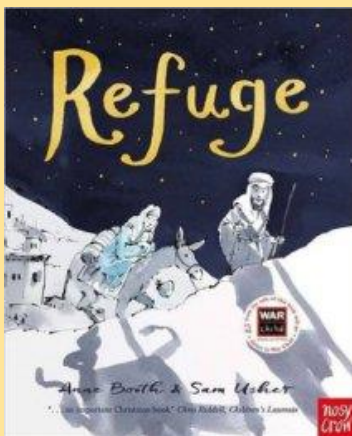
## **Christmas Wonderworld**

### **Children's books and children's spirituality**

*By Katie McGlew*

*With so much else on our minds, it is strange to be thinking about Christmas right now! However, as our next issue will be in the spring, this is the best opportunity to share some more recommendations by Katie McGlew, from Godly Play Scotland. This time, she offers high quality children's books for Christmas.*

### **Refuge by Anne Booth, illustrated by Sam Usher**

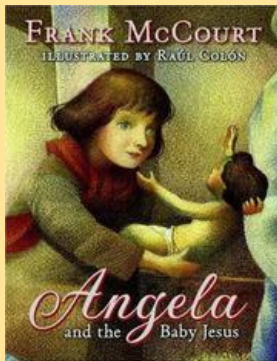


Published in 2015, the donkey narrates this poetic and timely version of the Christmas story, with a subtle emphasis on the man, woman and baby as refugees. They leave the danger of Bethlehem 'through empty streets, whilst people were sleeping, hoping for the kindness of strangers. Again'. They are sustained by each other, by love of their child and 'whispered blessings' from the shepherds, until we see them find refuge and hospitality in Egypt.

<http://nosycrow.com/product/refuge/>



### Angela and the Baby Jesus by Frank McCourt, illustrated by Raúl Colón



From the author of the Pulitzer-winning memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, this picture book tells a humorous and moving story from Limerick at the turn of the twentieth century. Six-year-old Angela steals the statue of the Baby Jesus from the nativity scene at St Joseph's Church, concerned that he is cold without a blanket, as she herself is often cold and hungry. Angela's authenticity glows out from the shadowy illustrations, and the engaging text is full of evocative descriptions of urban life in Ireland at that time: the snuffling old people in the church, a nice cup of tea with lots and lots of sugar, flickering gaslight, outside lavatories, and the large family gathered round the fire.

[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL27624W/Angela\\_and\\_the\\_Baby\\_Jesus](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL27624W/Angela_and_the_Baby_Jesus)

### Christmas by Dick Bruna



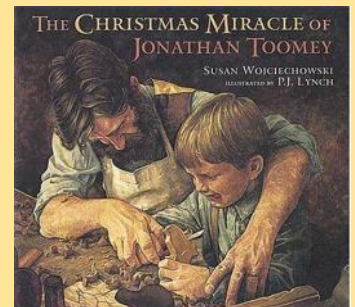
Perfect for young readers, the illustrations express the events and emotions of the Christmas story as clearly as anyone could wish for, and the words are concise and straightforward. The Dutch illustrator, Dick Bruna, who also wrote the famous Miffy books, has a distinctive style of simple, uncluttered pictures with bold black outlines and bright colours. These are attractive and

memorable, although the exoticism of his three wise kings now feels dated. The 50th anniversary edition of this book has a luxurious white and gold cover, a ribbon bookmark with dangling Bruna angel, and the original elongated landscape shape.

[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1736335W/The\\_Christmas\\_Book](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1736335W/The_Christmas_Book)

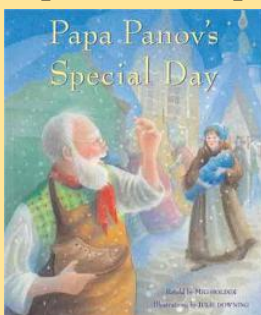
### The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey by Susan Wojciechowski.

A poignant story set in an early American frontier village. Grumpy Jonathan Toomey carries the great weight of bereavement. Healing comes through the process of carving a set of nativity figures and connecting emotionally with the characters of the Christmas story, and with a young boy and his widowed mother. The illustrator, P. J. Lynch was awarded the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal for the beautiful paintings.



[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL108101W/The\\_Christmas\\_miracle\\_of\\_Jonathan\\_Toomey](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL108101W/The_Christmas_miracle_of_Jonathan_Toomey)

### Papa Panov's Special Day by Mig Holder, illustrated by Julie Downing



A folktale which explores the parable in Matthew 25 – finding Christ in 'the least of these brothers and sisters of mine'. An old shoemaker is kind to strangers on Christmas Eve, and comes to understand that he has been visited by the boy Jesus in the people he helped. Julie Downing's sentimental pictures are laden with festive snowflakes and her Papa Panov resembles Father Christmas, so perhaps seek out a second-hand copy of the 1978 edition illustrated by Nathalie Vilain.

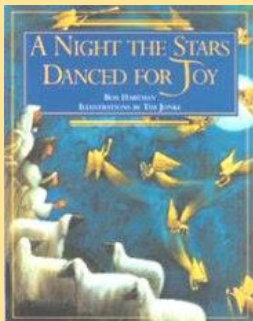
[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL8239295M/Papa\\_Panov's\\_Special\\_Day](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL8239295M/Papa_Panov's_Special_Day)



## Doing Christmas by Sarah Garland

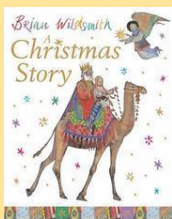
In this deeply rewarding wee book, we recognise the loving chaos of family life, as a calm single mother, her pre-schooler, toddler and a rambunctious dog prepare for Christmas and a visit from their racy Granny. The illustrations are packed with funny details, accompanied by the simplest of words, in the style of a school reading book. The pictures gently subvert the text, as in the double page spread captioned, 'It's Christmas Day and here come Granny', where Granny's snazzy red sports-car vrooms dramatically in every direction. Next, we see a peaceful Christmas morning scene of contented dishevelment interrupted by the honking of the sports car, and Mum must open the door in her nightshirt: 'She is early'. Sarah Garland's books are entertaining, unsentimental and affectionate. Also highly recommended is her more recent 2015 title, *Azzi in Between*, about a refugee child arriving and settling in Britain.

[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL20503309M/Doing\\_Christmas](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL20503309M/Doing_Christmas)



## A Night the Stars Danced for Joy by Bob Hartman

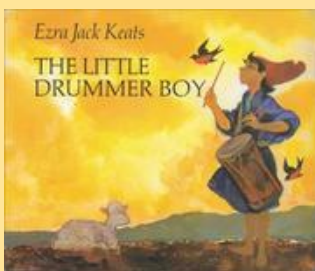
A family of shepherds express their human yearnings as they wish on a shooting star on the hills outside Bethlehem. The father craves a saviour from the tyranny of Roman occupation, the mother wants peace from bitter regrets and the shepherd boy longs for excitement and joy. The fanciful illustrations in rich blue and golden pastels show the pyrotechnics of the angels who appear to the shepherds. The story accentuates a motif of deep, known truth. The angels sing 'a song that the shepherds had never heard before, to a tune that had been humming in their heads for ever'. When Mary hears of their experience, the look in her eyes said, 'How wonderful' but also, 'I'm not surprised'. Older children will enjoy the perspective of the shepherds, and adults may find themselves drawn back for repeated, reflective readings.



## A Christmas Story by Brian Wildsmith

A child's-eye perspective on the nativity story, told with glowing, jewel-coloured pictures and lavish gold illuminations. The simple tale shows the progress of a little girl and a young donkey, following Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Older readers can spot hints in the text and illustrations at the fuller story, such as a glimpse through a window of the Magi being received in Jerusalem: 'There are important visitors here to see King Herod'.

[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1704002W/A\\_Christmas\\_Story](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1704002W/A_Christmas_Story)



## The Little Drummer Boy by Ezra Jack Keats

The popular Christmas song is set with wonderful collage and paint pictures. Much of each page is taken up with swirling coloured skies and foregrounds, which warm to a radiant golden glow as the Boy's gift of music for Jesus is accepted. Even a young baby will be engaged by the simple silhouette of the ox and lamb dancing joyfully, and the tiny hand of the infant Jesus reaching from his manger. Currently out of print, but second-hand copies are well worth tracking down online.

[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL831056W/The\\_little\\_drummer\\_boy](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL831056W/The_little_drummer_boy)

## Sending out **www.godlyplay.uk**

We are not yet in a position to offer and advertise any face-to-face courses, but do keep an eye on our website and on our Facebook group for the new, online developments outlined in the article on page 2, that will be available over the autumn.

We have postponed our biannual conference which, in normal circumstances, would have taken place in May 2021. However, please look out for online get togethers that might offer at least some kind of alternative fellowship, support and exploration.

Around Remembrance Sunday you might like to use the Godly Play story developed for this time:

<https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Remembrance.pdf>

As the autumn moves on you might like to look for an Advent presentation here:

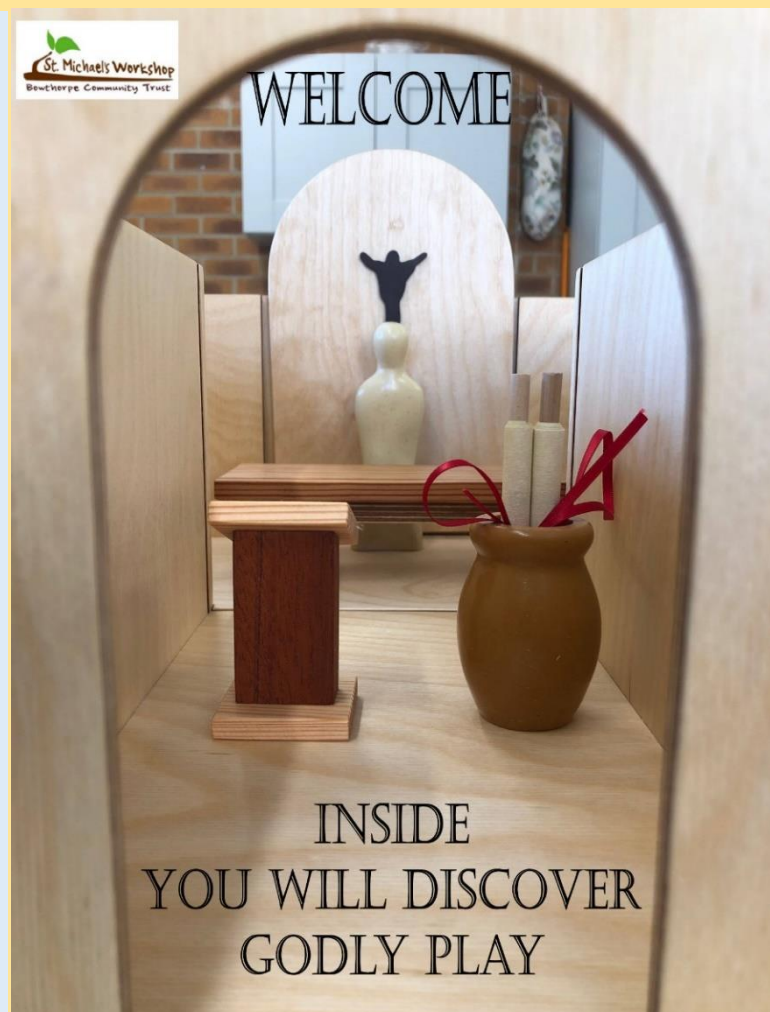
<https://www.godlyplay.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/An-Advent-presentation.pdf>

St Michael's Workshop, that supplies Godly Play materials, is open for business and eager to supply all that you need.

The workshop is a haven for its trainees, people with a variety of disabilities. We hope and pray that the trainees will soon be able to return to their work, meanwhile staff are keeping up with the orders.

### **Offer for Godly Play UK Associates**

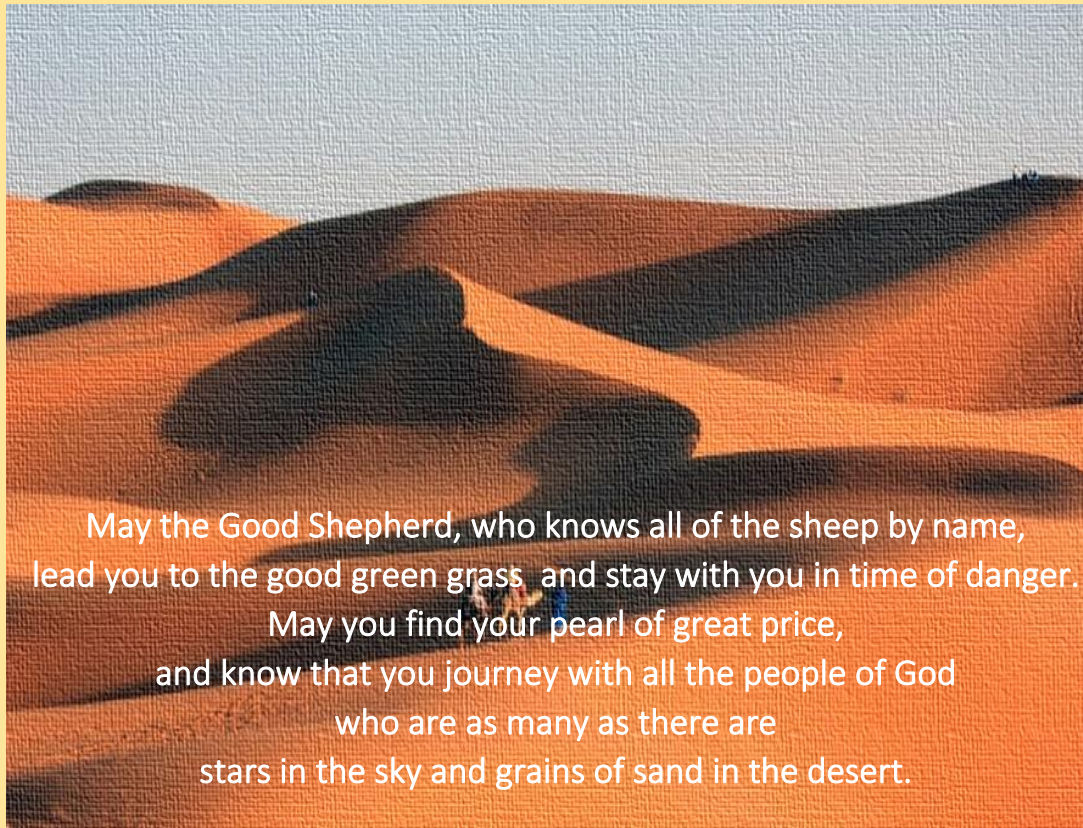
All Associates will henceforth be entitled to a 5% discount off each purchase from Bowthorpe. A discount code will be sent to all members. Perhaps you might like to think about what you could buy for Christmas time.





## **Associates of Godly Play UK: Caring about what really matters...**

Thank you so much for supporting Godly Play UK. In the present challenging circumstances, we could not have managed without you. We hope this issue has stimulated your concern for childhood spirituality. Do get in touch with suggestions for future issues.



*taking childhood spirituality seriously*

**Godly Play<sup>UK</sup>**

*A Christian movement centred on childhood spirituality –  
providing training to transform thinking and practice for the whole of life*

**Registered Charity No. 1116846**

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