

taking childhood spirituality seriously

Godly Play^{UK}

Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine : No. 2 Spring 2018

Editor: Rebecca Nye

At the threshold...

*A Warm Welcome to all our Associate Members;
I wonder what will be especially for you in this issue?*



We've been spring-cleaning at Godly Play UK, so perhaps you noticed that our logo has been spruced up? It can be really hard to explain what Godly Play is. But after a lot of thought, we've settled on :

Taking Childhood Spirituality Seriously: Godly Play UK

So, in a nutshell, this is our mission - serving not only *children* but calling out the significance of *childhood* at the heart of our spiritual life, and the seriousness of play.

There's also a new strapline to expand on what Godly Play UK actually offers:

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

This highlights that Godly Play training offers something unique - an experience that often stimulates new ways of seeing and provides highly effective practical skills for diverse contexts. So, when you're stuck for ways to describe Godly Play, these phrases might help.

It's been great to receive encouraging comments about our first issue. In this one you'll find already familiar elements - a spotlight on a Godly Play space, an interview with someone interesting (Peter Privett no less!), book reviews and news. And, to take your time over, this issue has two reflective feature articles: theological reflection from Anne Richards on 'Well-being and Godly Play' and Rebecca Nye's thoughts about 'Gifts in Godly Play'.

So, when you feel ready, read on...



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News: ‘Celtic Godly Play’ reports from Wales and Scotland

By Rebecca Nye with Diana Williams, Cass Meurig and Alex Mackenzie

When we tell the story so far of Godly Play UK, there’s often mention of exciting, unexpected invitations to take Godly Play to countries all over Europe. Our understanding of Godly Play has doubtless been enriched by encounters in many ‘strange and foreign places’ including Latvia, Belarus, Spain, Norway, Germany, Holland and Belgium. However, it’s important to notice the diversity closer to home too. So here are reports from Wales and Scotland on the experience and unique challenges of spreading Godly Play in the Celtic regions of the UK.



Abergavenny-based trainer for South Wales, Diana Williams explains: ‘Interest in Godly Play and childhood spirituality is catching on across South Wales both in school and church settings. Practitioners who were previously rather isolated now have a network group of support which meets three times a year across the region. The initial flame of interest has steadily spread from west to east and into the valleys.’

This spread is seen in an expanding support base that includes the children’s and families’ officers of the four southern Church in Wales Dioceses, a growing number of Godly Play Advocates, excellent links to the Salvation Army and the backing of the Director of Catholic Education.

All this support has allowed for a number of taster, promotional and training events to take place. ‘The interest spreading among Catholic primary schools has been particularly exciting,’ says Diana, and there are now emerging GP spaces in schools in Newport, Neath and Abergavenny. She believes that ‘these developments are helped practically by an active South Wales Facebook page, but also by the creativity and dedication of all those who hold onto the vision of seeing Godly Play ‘catch fire’ across Wales.’

Although in North Wales Godly Play has been slower to establish, there are encouraging signs. Trainer Cass Meurig, based in Bala, works to promote Godly Play and to translate the stories into the Welsh language. She explains, ‘being a Godly Play trainer in North Wales has meant starting from scratch in most areas. Quite a few people have been trained over the years and some of those have been active in using the method in their own churches, but the very rural nature of the area has meant that it has been harder to establish a network of Godly Players.’ However after running a series of one-day introductions there has been a surge of interest, the establishment of Godly Play in several new locations and good uptake on the three-day training course in Newtown.

**Ancient Hut Circle on
Holyhead, Anglesey in
North Wales.**

*Perhaps something like
Godly Play happened here
long ago?*

*I wonder what it would be
like to experience a session
here now?*



The Church in Wales is officially bilingual, most of the chapels are Welsh-medium and most of the schools in North Wales are taught through the medium of Welsh, so a critical issue is making Godly Play available in Welsh. Cass explains, ‘since I first trained in Godly Play I felt a particular call to translate the stories into Welsh. My own Godly Play practice has been almost entirely in Welsh from the start.’ She approached the Godly Play Foundation to discuss translating the core stories, and was advised to spend a few years trying out translations and sharing them with other trained Godly Players. Now all the stories in Volumes 2, 3 and 4 have been translated and she is working on Volume 6. Hopefully in due course we’ll see a full publication of the books in Welsh.



In Scotland, Godly Play’s seeds are also bearing fruit. Edinburgh-based trainer Alex Mackenzie says, ‘It’s amazing to think that Godly Play Scotland will be celebrating its eighth birthday in June.’ In fact in Scotland Godly Play feels it has outgrown being a just a voluntary organisation, so has recently taken steps to become charity, Godly Play Scotland. ‘It feels like a big step’ Alex admits.

In fact, 2018 is set to be a particular busy year for Alex and her small, dedicated team. A Godly Play space is being set up in Inverness Cathedral which, like the Godly Play Centre in Edinburgh, will have storytelling materials for people to borrow. Two training courses are in their calendar this spring, with plans for a residential retreat in early summer too.

Alex advises us to look out for ‘#thisgirlcan’ demonstrating how social media is a key part of the Scottish communication strategy in a context which, like Wales, has to contend with large geographical areas that makes face-to-face contact and support more challenging.

The Rev Russell McLarty, a Church of Scotland minister, storyteller and workshop leader with the Scottish Storytelling Forum will be the keynote speaker at Godly Play Scotland’s story-themed conference in November (9-10th) at Inverness Cathedral. A busy year indeed!

News: Associate Membership Latest Update!

By Rebecca Nye

At the time of going to press, it is fantastic to report that there now 95 Associate Members of Godly Play UK, each one generously pledging their support for Godly Play’s future, and ensuring we can spread its seeds and nurture its seedlings.

There is now also an option for church/school membership, and even a ‘couples’ membership! Anyone who might support our mission to ‘take childhood spirituality seriously’ can become a member – those who have experienced the spiritual support that Godly Play can offer, those who use Godly Play and those who don’t, and most of all those who would like the gentle influence of Godly Play to be part of every childhood. So, if you can think of someone who might be interested, please do mention the scheme to them.



It’s good that some are attracted also by the chance to read this magazine which is free to Associate Members. Don’t forget that from May 2018 you can also get a £15 discount on a single order of Godly Play resources from our supplier St Michael’s Workshop, Bowthorpe.

As the first year of Associate Membership is free, the valuable funds this scheme will provide are just starting to come in. These are already making an incredible difference to our ability to think creatively and strategically. The Trustees are meeting shortly to discuss various proposals and to discern priority areas for new initiatives and strengthening support.

Finally, as an Associate Member, you will be able to book for the next Godly Play UK Conference at a discounted rate. This will be on May 11th 2019 – keep the date!

Feature Article : Gifts and Godly Play

by Rebecca Nye, Godly Play UK Trainer and Associate Lecturer in Child Psychology and Childhood Studies, The Open University

Pledging an annual gift is a key part of becoming an Associate Member of Godly Play UK. Your gift will help to sustain things in our movement's work which are already making a difference to children's spirituality and to child-like spirituality.

But your pledge is also a gift for the future of Godly Play UK, giving towards things that are currently invisible and intangible and, like the gift from good fairy godmother at Sleeping Beauty's christening, they may take years to bear fruit. We are enormously grateful to all Associates for their gift to Godly Play UK.



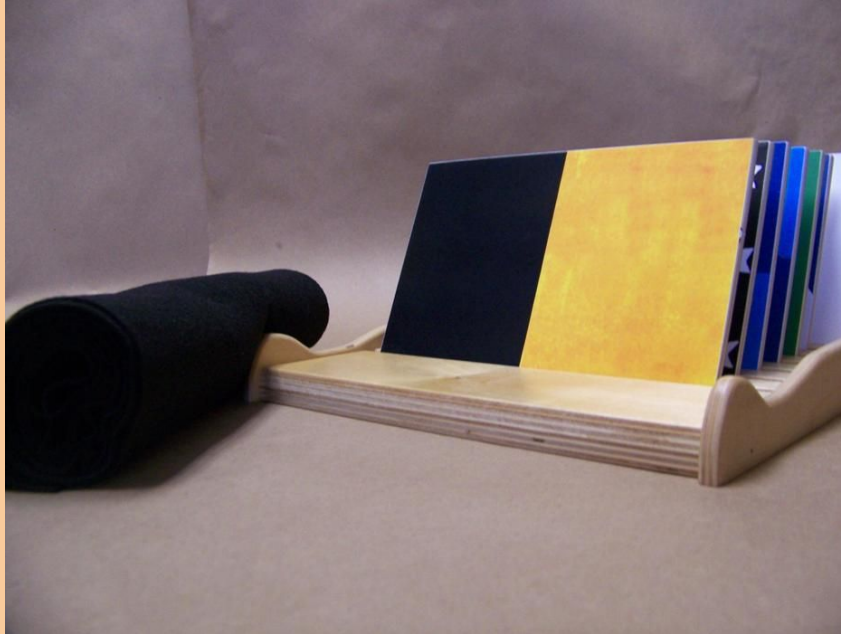
In this article Rebecca considers some of the ways in which gifts appear in Godly Play stories, and wonders what the gift of Godly Play might really be.

In the beginning

Let's start at the beginning. In the Creation story, the storyteller asks 'I wonder what is the biggest gift you have ever received?' This seems to break the rules of the sacred story genre by inviting some wondering before we get into the main narrative. Why do we do that? I think it's about reframing the narrative in at least two ways.

First, having this preparatory chat about gifts in general can help to shift the circle out of a literal and perhaps limited mindset in which Creation is thought of as 'making material stuff'. In the carefully-worded script, God is never described as *making* land, or days or people, rather God *gives the gift* of these things. This subtlety changes the narrative from being like the 'method section' of a science report to the description of an act of kindness. 'Giving the gift' implies a relationship, *from* someone and *to* someone, in contrast to 'making' which could be quite solitary. So, this is a deliberate and valuable way of teaching a theological perspective on the first Creation narrative. For children under ten this can be especially helpful as their natural psychological tendency can be to latch onto a literal mode of interpretation, which may fall apart when they develop a capacity for more abstract thinking. Presenting them with a traditional image of God as a 'making' figure risks conjuring up ideas about giant-scale materials and a kind of magical ability to manufacture

this or that. If this happens, there will be bumps, if not crashes, when children encounter other models of understanding, especially evolution and the Big Bang theory. Emphasising 'God gave the gift' instead of 'God made' is itself a really crucial gift that Godly Play offers, so that people of any age and all kinds of perspectives (literalists, Creationists, those taking a poetic interpretation, etc.) can enter the story on their own terms, and together.



By asking 'I wonder what is the biggest gift you have ever received?' the whole narrative is reframed.

By asking before we even begin, 'I wonder what's the biggest gift...?', leads to the second way the narrative is reframed. Inviting wondering *before* the story gets going is usually something reserved for parables in Godly Play, because they need such a lot of creative imagination to help us enter their sideways, upside-down kind of thinking. So, with parables, the 'pre-wondering' questions help to establish that the story that follows is not straightforward narrative – we don't get straight into it. However, using this technique for the Creation story may also subtly prompt participants to appreciate this sacred story's mythical qualities, its credibility as a wonderful poem or song of our origins in God, and for some, a kind of history too. In other words, being asked about 'the biggest gift' gives an important hint that there's a parable quality to this (i.e. there might be times when this feels hard to get into, as though the door is shut, that it's difficult but it is worth coming back to...) So, this is another important function of the wondering about the 'biggest gifts' with the circle before the story starts. It's *not* just to pass the time, nor is it merely a device to 'get the children involved', rather it offers deep teaching that reframes the story and how much it calls for our creative response.

It is then interesting to look at what actually happens when this wondering question about gifts is asked in a Godly Play session. With adults, this wondering is sometimes very slow to start. Some assume that this is really a childish question, so they are embarrassed, or they might slip into role-playing childishly. With children, sometimes the question incites a kind of competition about who can claim to have had the biggest or costliest present. However,

allowing that to run its course without any negative judgement nearly always sees the pattern broken by one a child who eventually suggests something that is not *literally* big or impressive. The hardest time I ever had with this question was with a group of children in a school where the pupils' affluence seemed to have had a depriving effect on their spiritual sensitivity, and I really thought no one would break the pattern of expensive things. By contrast, trainer Andrea Harrison found that when she told the story to children in Kenya, every child from the age of 5 onwards said that 'life' or 'my life' was obviously the biggest gift.

Gifts and presence

I remember feeling overwhelmed after my initial research into children's spirituality: I now knew what it was like, but I really didn't know what to *do* to help it to flourish. I realised that it would be a lifetime's work to develop a method that could channel an understanding of children's spirituality into a practical approach to Christian nurture. Discovering that Jerome Berryman has given precisely a lifetime to this seemed to me to be a heaven-sent gift. It is evident that many others, worldwide, feel enormously grateful that Godly Play has been devised so carefully and that they are thankful for its deep, transformative effects on their work with children, in children's lives and in their own spiritual journey. So my thoughts turn now to wider reflections on Godly Play's 'gift' and 'present' metaphors.



It is fascinating to look into the etymology and definitions of the words 'gift' and 'present'. The word 'present' has associations with the action of **presenting** something, whereas 'gift' has associations with a different action: **giving**. A gift is 'something given voluntarily without payment in return, as to show favour, honour an occasion or make a gesture of assistance' (Dictionary.com). These different connotations are worth

pondering. In fact the word 'gift' comes from the proto-Indo-European base and originally from the Sanskrit word 'gabhasti' which means 'hand' or 'forearm'. So it really conjures up the sense of putting something into someone else's *hands*. 'Gabhasti' is also the root of our word 'habit', which resonates brilliantly with the Godly Play Associate's pledge of regular, habitual giving to Godly Play UK.

The word 'present' has a different sense, and comes from an Old French root. It signifies 'being there'; it implies being around when something is offered or received. Just as the word 'gift' has deep religious (monastic) resonance with 'things done with our *hands*' and with an attitude of *habit*, so there is also a kind of spiritual resonance with the meaning of 'present' as a form of *presence*, which might be God's presence, or our own authentic

presence in spiritual encounters. When Abraham found, at Bethel and Shechem, that 'God was there' – we see that God was 'present'. Only a very short leap is required to recognise God's presence as a present! Indeed, children sometimes hear the invitation, 'Let's enjoy the presence of God', as 'Let's enjoy the presents of God'!

But how might an appreciation of the roots of these words make a difference to our thinking about children's spirituality, and about Godly Play? Of all the Bible references to children, perhaps the best known is 'Children are a gift from the Lord' (Psalm 127). I wonder what the links between children, gifts and God could really be?

The gift of childhood

So, unearthing the connotations of 'gift' and 'present' encourages us to value **physical, hand-to-hand reality**, a **habit of generosity** rather than one off actions, and the **importance of simply 'being there'**. In turn perhaps, this offers a theology of childhood in a nutshell.



First of all, through childhood we glimpse that the nature of God is inescapably tied up with *physicality*, a dependency on bodily care and love, characterised by movement and response – touching, hugging, being held. Secondly, through childhood we glimpse the nature of God as an ongoing project of *renewal*, a habit of giving more and a mindset of 'again, again!' And thirdly, children draw our attention to the

virtue of presence, just being, rather than to a capacity to do things. Their true vocation is to be a child (and ours is to become like a child again), just as God's own vocation is the archetypal 'To be': I am who I am (Exodus 3.14).

Perhaps there's something in these reflections about gifts, God, children and Godly Play to take your own wondering further...

I wonder where you see the spirituality of physical encounter, of placing the gift of faith into the hands of children as givers, and as receivers? How does Godly Play try to help that?

I wonder how Godly Play helps you to recognise children as presents and as signs of God's presence?

I wonder what part of Godly Play has been the biggest gift for you?

New friends : Called to the wider circle

By Rebecca Nye



'What's the best size for a Godly Play circle?' is a very frequently-asked question. Usually in Godly Play there are no right answers as such, but this one is an exception because a good answer is 'around twelve'! Certainly 'about twelve' seems suited to the mixture of intimacy and interaction that Godly Play sessions thrive on. Too many risks voices and needs being ignored, too few misses opportunities to learn from our differences.

Thanks to our recent 'training for trainers' course in November, there are now 12 active trainers based in England and a further 2 in Wales, and 3 in Scotland. These trainers both support, and are supported, by local advocates and by Godly Play UK's trustees - circles within circles!

'Feeling called' is how those who recently became new trainers described undertaking 'trainer training'. It certainly involved a lot of discernment. Prior to their intensive 6-day residential training course, each trainee reflected for about a year with a mentor, shadowed courses, wrestled with Berryman's scholarly work and prepared written reflections on their Godly Play practice and children's spirituality.

This expanded trainer circle includes Alison Summerskill, former chair of Godly Play UK trustees. She works in children's ministry in Gloucestershire, and her MA included a study of Godly Play training. Katherine Lyddon is Exeter Diocese's Children's Work Adviser covering a vast area of Devon and Cornwall. Originally a primary teacher, her diocesan work demands adult education skills too - crucial for Godly Play training. Judy Yeomans has been very active advocate in the South East. Her expertise includes leading innovative projects such as a Godly Play holiday club which will feature in our next issue. Similarly, being an advocate led Hull-based Susie Steel to discern her call to train as a trainer. She brings extensive experience of working with children with complex needs in areas of urban deprivation.

Our new Scottish trainers include Richard Knott, who was a reluctant 'convert' to Godly Play, admitting to being rather unconvinced until he began to put his three-day course experience into practice with children. And Michelle Brown, originally from the US who has been studying here and raising a family. In fact, a further 18 people from other countries were also put forward to 'train as trainers', so in 2017 we had to run two of these intensive programmes - each with just the right number: 12!

Feature Article : Godly Play and Well-Being

by Anne Richards, National Adviser for the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England on mission theology, new religious movements and alternative spiritualities



Anne is a wise and highly-sought after person in many contexts so we are incredibly fortunate that she is a Trustee and long-term friend of Godly Play. Anne's theological writing is highly recommended, including *Through the Eyes of a Child* (CHP 2009 with Peter Privett) and *Children in the Bible* (SPCK 2013). These books were written to draw theological attention to the rich themes of childhood. In this article she reveals that her vocation of 'doing theology' emerges powerfully from her own childhood experiences.

When I've been speaking at a conference or some other public occasion, strangers (usually clergy) often come up to me and begin their post-lecture small talk with, 'Where did you do your theology?' This is a loaded question of course. They expect me to name some venerable institution of theological education and to refer to wise and beloved teachers of whose (white, male, western) tradition of thought I will have drunk deeply. And they hope this will help them to 'place' me in a particular theological pattern which will go a long way to explaining how I think, if not excuse, what I may have said in the talk!

Over the years I have prepared for this and have a stock of small, amusing vignettes to deflect them: discussing Greek philosophy with a mad ex-Jesuit in a thunderstorm, ducking as if Zeus himself were trying to kill us; mangling Hebrew pronunciation with a patient, gentle, but horrified Rabbi; wrangling the nature of good and evil with the novelist Iris Murdoch, who merely turned upon me a basilisk stare and said ...nothing, for the rest of the evening.

The truth is, I did not 'do' theology anywhere; theology did me. But that is a great deal more difficult to describe, since there isn't a predictable pattern of learning, a tradition or pedagogical method which laid it out. Rather, later learning and methods organised and stratified what had *already* happened to me. It crystallised out what was inchoate, cut and polished the internal mirrors and showed in its diamond what I already knew. In fact, this 'doing theology' emerged directly from a series of powerful experiences when I was a child.



For example: I was walking home from infant school with my grandmother when I was assaulted by the word 'well'. I was turning the word over on my tongue until it started to ring in my head, and I seemed to see all its many meanings simultaneously and inhabit the word absolutely. I indwelt the Word.

I was suddenly in a deep, brick well, hung with plants, in cool water, tasting its refreshment, looking up at the sky, at the sun and the stars. All creation seemed to be contained within it, and, as I contemplated its vast capacity, I realised what it meant to be well, healthy, balanced, completely and joyously alive. I had become Well.



My grandmother realised how rapt I was and asked me what I was thinking about. 'Well...' I said, and started laughing. I had no words to describe ineffable wellness. It was a secret between me and God.

That experience of wellness as a small child began to connect to other things and I collected them in my own personal well of wellness – the exhilaration of the blue flash of a kingfisher, my mother returning home, the end of the curve on a swing, singing, decorating a Christmas tree, the exact texture and sounds of autumn leaves. These things filled my well with water of life. Other things drained it – illness, my mother crying, the cold, shivering damp of a swimming-pool changing room, nameless and intractable fears, pain, losses.

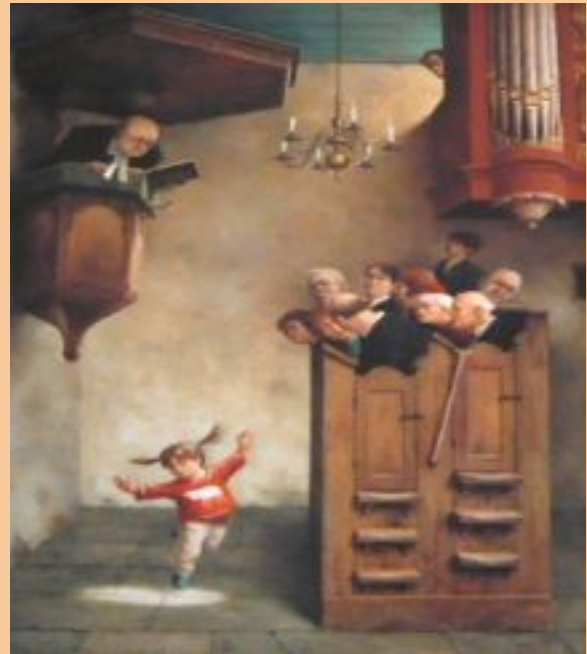
In her book, *The Only Mind Worth Having* (2015) Fiona Gardner looks at the paradox of the 'child mind'. Using the life and works of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton as a lens, she argues that our spiritual maturity, becoming 'as little children' requires blending these kinds of childhood epiphany with our adult experience. What we must not do is hunt for nostalgia and sentiment, the good old days, but look for the surrender of self we knew as children which has been disguised by adult ego. This will lift the shadows with which we surround ourselves and let us see and inhabit the God-reality underneath. For Merton this led to seeing people 'walking around, shining like the sun'.

Interestingly, Gardner points to play, dance, poetry and all kinds of creativity as being mechanisms which allow us to access this child mind, the only mind worth having. For me all of those things are routes to theological reflection and deepening spirituality, but theology has also continued to 'do' me. My child's 'well' experience ran delighted to the discovery of all those wells in biblical literature, supremely in the story of the Samaritan

woman who finds Jesus sitting by it, without a bucket, asking her for water. And more and more connections came, and were made, with Mother Julian promising that all will be well.

This is why I think Godly Play is such an extraordinary means of initiating and enabling spiritual development in children and adults alike. It permits the imaginative wondering that promotes 'wellness' but at the same time creates frameworks for knitting dreams, play and insight into the warp and woof of theological and spiritual understanding so that it does not get lost, but gets gathered up, glittering. Children can link their God-knowledge to the Bible, to prayer and to sacrament and realise that they are not alone in vocation, tumbled over laughing, by the Spirit. Brought up outside the Church until I went and found it, I am aware that my own 'well-being' would have been enhanced had I had such a place to put my own spiritual inklings and complicated journey, a context for blazing and troubling experiences of God.

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More and more children are now living far away from any kind of religious worldview. But that will not stop them having powerful, life-moulding spiritual experiences. Theology will come and 'do' them whether they know what it is or not and it will continue to 'do' them their whole lives. They need the context and opportunity that Godly Play can provide. We do our faith no favours by not putting resources and energy into such a rich source of spiritual nurture.

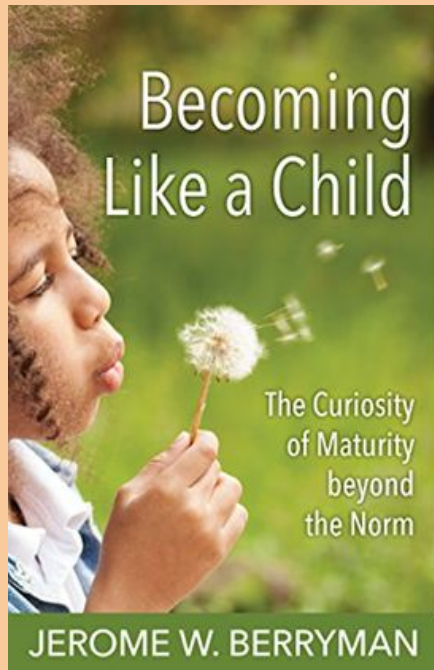
But to do so we have to change the mindset of people who expect us to have other answers for how we 'do' our theology. And that change is a fundamental mission question for today's Church.



If you would like to comment on any of our articles, please write to the Editor:
rebecca.nye@ntlworld

Reviews: Books to take your wondering further...

Reviews by Stuart Lee and Gill Ambrose



'Becoming Like a Child: The Curiosity of Maturity Beyond the Norm', Jerome W. Berryman (2017) New York: Church Publishing £15.95

In his most recent work, Jerome Berryman takes a paradoxical saying of Jesus as his starting point and central focus: 'Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it' (Mark 10:15).

A surprising amount of time is taken to explain and explore the structure and language the book will use. This may be because it gathers together such a breadth of thought and experience that we need a structure to contain and shape what we are offered. However, I think his intention is also to bring awareness to the creative process that is at work behind and throughout the book and therefore invite us to reflect on the creative process

in our own lives, and in the flow of work that happens within Godly Play sessions too.

In the first chapter, Berryman confronts us with the paradoxical and playful nature of Jesus' saying through which, he believes, Jesus intends to 'force us to experience the reality of being a child and of being an adult at the same time to challenge us with a new view of human nature' (p.40). The assertion of the innate spiritual experience of the child, from which adults can learn, should come as no surprise to those who regularly sit in Godly Play circles. However, we should not forget that this still comes as a revelation and challenge to many within the Church.

The next two chapters set out to think about what a child might really be. Here Berryman identifies the child's core experience of 'being permitted to be' through (ideally) the joy and acceptance of adults. Such an experience fosters an attitude of openness and wonder in the child and an implicit permission to play and explore. He goes further to suggest that play is the dynamic activity that enables human beings, of all ages, 'to work through developmental crises' (p.61). It is the open, 'as if' quality of play that can turn a crisis or conflict into a possibility. He then considers children as parables, metaphors through which he demonstrates how their 'unlikeness' to adults points to what is needed for entry into the kingdom. There is a reminder here of the need for adults to be sensitive when meeting the silence and language of children. We sometimes have a need to resolve paradox or pin down meaning and this can be inimical to the 'silent knowing' of a child (p.83).



Berryman recounts a session where he shares the Parable of the Leaven with a group of 5-12 year olds. It is a masterclass in working with parables. I was reminded of how often we become focussed on getting the story right, telling it well or getting through all those wondering questions. This session, like the whole of the book, reminds us that Godly Play is fundamentally a 'way of being' with children (and, indeed, adults). It is his attitude of supportive curiosity that shines through this account. A further section on 'Existential Limits and Anxiety' provides us with a fascinating and concise insight into the genesis of

Godly Play, its parent literature and traditions.

The fourth chapter is fairly dense. It has the all-encompassing and multi-disciplinary approach that suggests a serious attempt to synthesise a lifetime of learning, research, experience and prayer. Put (very) simply: we discover our likeness with God in our creativity and generativity. The Godly Play storyteller and doorperson cooperate with God's creativity when they create, allow or facilitate creativity in others. This emphasis on the continuing plasticity of the brain will be encouraging to those practicing Godly Play in elderly or care settings, where opportunities for creativity and playfulness may be few and far between.

Chapter five raises the question of how we might live in the flow of creativity without it becoming rigid and prescriptive ('pseudo-play') or chaotic and meaningless (a form of madness). I sensed there might be an even deeper question, which is not only appropriate for this man in the latter stages of his life, about how to live creatively in the face of the inevitability of decay, disintegration and death. Berryman suggests the hint of an answer comes in noticing of the spontaneous and intuitive gratitude of children.



The book ends with a metaphor of creative life as a river, flowing between rigidity and chaos. How can we steer a middle path, aligning the flow of our lives with the creativity that flows out from and returns to the Creator? This is perhaps the question behind the whole book. The attitudes practiced in the Godly Play tradition are surely a significant contribution to working out an answer to this very question.

Having read this book, I was left with an uplifting sense of the capacity of Godly Play to provide all who sit in its circles an opportunity to bump into and test the existential limits of our knowing and living, but also our need of the God who can contain and hold all the anxiety that such an experience inevitably evokes.

Stuart Lee Godly Play UK Trainer



Children of God Storybook Bible, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, (2010)
Collins, £9.99

Although it was published in 2010, this collection of key biblical stories, retold for young children, deserves more publicity. An international group of illustrators, drawn together by Lux Verbi BM, reflects the global nature of the Christian story. They have provided diverse, but unfailingly beautiful, pictures which give life to key features of each narrative using gentle, flowing colours.

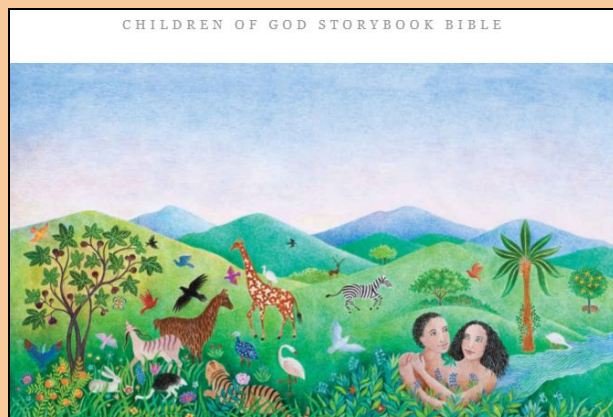
Archbishop Tutu has selected 28 Old Testament stories, focusing largely on tales of the patriarchs, significant narratives about King David and King Solomon and four significant texts from the prophets. Ruth and Esther ensure there are women's stories to be heard.

The 32 New Testament texts are drawn mostly from the gospels, with the addition of four stories from Acts. Beautiful, comforting words from Revelation 21 and 22 conclude the book.

Almost all the stories occupy a double page spread held together by the artwork, and the graphic styles are sensitively selected to enhance the nature of the texts they illustrate. A single line, simple prayer concludes each spread.

While each story in this collection will stand alone, the intelligent selection of the texts offers a careful revelation of salvation history, and the warm narrative style draws in the young reader or listener to discern the love that is at the heart of these mysterious, holy stories. If you are looking for a children's Bible for a Godly Play room, or a christening or first communion present, I suggest that it is worth seeking out this book.

Gill Ambrose Godly Play UK Trustee



If you would like to suggest a book, or would like to write a review, do let us know!

Spotlight on Sacred Space:

‘Two women walk into a pub...’ and eventually end up with a ‘wonderful’ classroom!

By Christine Sandiford and Rachel Bundock

Creating a good space for Godly Play is crucial, but it is also one of the method’s greatest challenges. This regular ‘spotlight on sacred space’ explores how different places have tackled this, with lots of tips along the way. This tells the decade-long story of how Emmanuel Church, Didsbury (Manchester) eventually came to have its own space for Godly Play. If you would like to contact the Church about a visit, please email cksandiford1@googlemail.com

In September 2006 we began a Godly Play group for our children in the pub next to St James’, Didsbury. This was a new venture for us in several ways: we had not had children’s work at St James’ for years, since our two churches combined in 1981 and all the youth work moved to Emmanuel at the other end of the village. Young families didn’t stay long at St James’ without Sunday provision for the children. There were no rooms in the church besides the small vestries, so it was a God-send when the pub hospitably allowed us to use their function room on Sunday mornings. In fact, we had never used Godly Play before and only had a few stories. But the enthusiastic support of our Vicar (who had been on a 3 day course himself) and a demonstration of the Creation story to an all-age congregation in the summer of 2006 inspired a good number of people to offer to get involved and Didsbury Godly Play was born!



After several years of lugging stories to the pub and back, and setting out resource materials on Sunday mornings, we longed for an inviting space that could be set up more permanently, so our time could be focussed on the children, and less on the set up/take down effort. Several of our adult leaders had visited the Godly Play Classroom in Sheffield for training courses, and had been bowled over by the beauty of their dedicated space, with enticing stories and books on display and a tantalising response materials corner.



While also developing a small 'Toddly Play' group for under 4s in our church vestry, in 2013 we moved Godly Play across the road to a community building that was being restored, and hired their conference room for an hour on Sunday mornings. They kindly let us store our Focal Shelf materials and response materials in a kitchen cupboard. It was an improvement, but still involved our adult helpers in unpacking and packing materials each Sunday.

Beautiful shelves on casters for the Saints materials in the current classroom



Over the years, we had gradually invested in many of the core stories from America and Bowthorpe (stored in my loft at that time), thanks to donations from some of our church members, and support from our 'children's work' budget. Some stories were also put together from charity shop findings (especially good baskets and wooden trays) or beautifully hand-made by church members.

From early 2014 Rachel, our new parish children's worker, started using Godly Play for one of the Sunday morning groups at our other church, Emmanuel, too. At first, this involved



using shared spaces again, and more setting up and packing away. There were times in 2013 when we wondered if our enthusiasm for Godly Play or our strength for toting boxes would fizzle out, but just when that seemed a dangerous possibility, a modest room became available in the Old Rectory next to Emmanuel. (Our Vicar can be very persuasive!) The charity that owned the building was closely linked to the church, and was willing to decorate

and carpet the room for us. A donation of shelving (sturdy wooden shelves on casters by Community Playthings) was provided by a church member, and in 2014 a classroom was born! It wasn't just for us, but the other users (homegroups, tutoring, counselling, yoga, etc.) were respectful of our materials, and chairs were moved in and out as needed. By April we were again re-locating into a larger room in the same building which even has a sink unit (which has proved to be very useful for the Feast, and washing glue pots, etc.).



It is wonderful to have a spacious and dedicated Godly Play Room that can be kept clean, tidy and ready for use and we are so grateful for all who enabled it to become a reality. If we were giving advice to someone dreaming of their own space, we would say that lots of storage space is important (some of our shelving are also cupboards) and natural light is a great asset.

What else have we learned? You may find you need more than one room! We now have three Godly Play groups meeting on Sunday mornings, so only one of them can use the dedicated space. Factor in space when buying shelves, etc, because a normal room may be too small when you add 15 or so children. We know that having a room downstairs or disabled accessible would be even better – ours is upstairs and not ideal, but still it is wonderful.

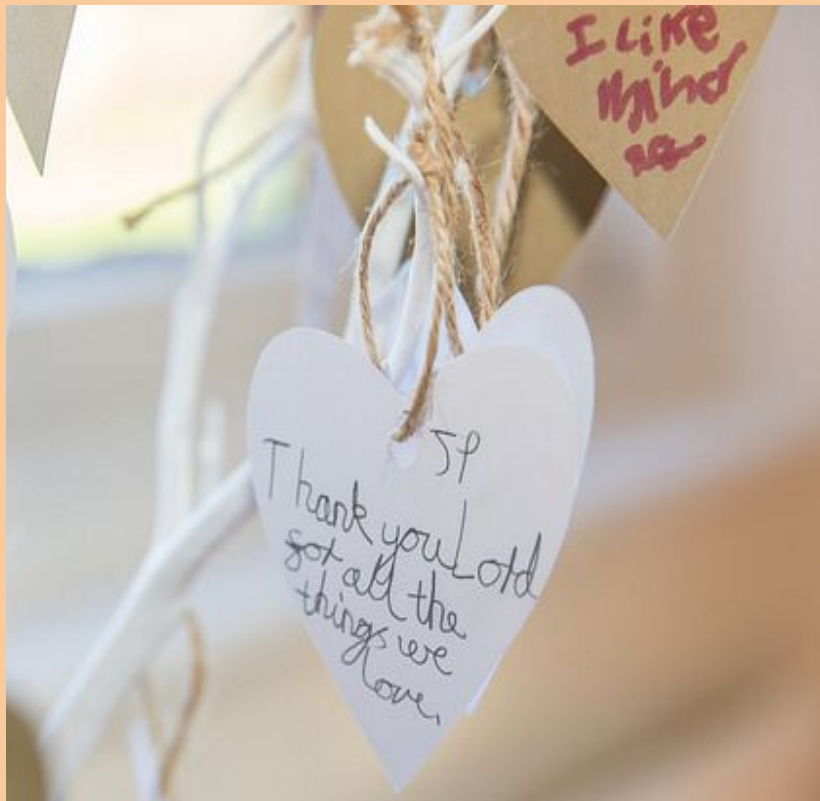
We still have a small Godly Play group for ages 3 to 11 meeting at St James', now in the Vestry. There are purpose-built shelves for storing the focal shelf and response materials, but due to sharing the space with church mice, we have had to compromise and use sturdy plastic boxes with lids for storage. Lovely natural baskets are too tempting for our little furry friends. And, of course, it all still needs setting out on a Sunday morning.



"I love how all the stories are arranged around you, because they remind you of the times you've heard them being told before" (Oliver, 15 - who's been part of our GP from the beginning when he was 4!)

Finally, we are delighted that our Godly Play is not just for Sundays. The stories are used in situ with children on Sunday mornings and for Godly Play training courses (Introductory and National) midweek, and also in our local schools. They have also been a gift to a group of adults with learning difficulties, to home groups, and in all-age services.

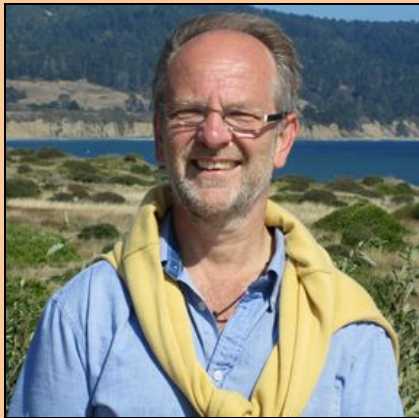
When visitors enter the Godly Play Room for the first time, it is heart-warming to watch them walk around, peer into boxes and gently inspect parts of this story or that. When we enter it, we immediately know it is a special place – set apart, calm and beautiful, but also strangely familiar. And that also helps us get ready to discover whatever gifts it has in store for us on each visit.



"The room makes me feel very welcome. You can clearly see what all the stories are, and it has a warm, bright feeling." (Sophie, 11)

We look forward to featuring more Godly Play spaces, created either permanently or week-by-week. Let us know if you'd like to tell your story here in a future issue.

A chance to meet: Peter Privett, Godly Play UK



As co-founder of Godly Play in the UK Peter hardly needs an introduction. In any case Peter's talents and experience are almost impossible to fit into just one paragraph, and include being a primary school teacher, parish priest, diocesan children's work adviser (Hereford) and textile artist. Now in semi-retirement, he is a very enthusiastic member of Rugby Operatic Society even recently playing a pantomime dame! His wisdom, creativity and sense of play flow through all he does for Godly Play, as you can hear in his replies below.

How did you get into Godly Play in the first place? What appealed?

I first saw Godly Play when I was an Children's Work Adviser in the late 1990's. Rebecca came to talk about her children's spirituality research, coupling this with a practical demonstration of parable of the Good Shepherd and I was quite interested. However, when I encountered Jerome Berryman himself in Mothers' Union headquarters in 1999, in the words of John Wesley, 'My heart was strangely warmed!' One one level what appealed was the method of using objects. It reminded me that I used to tell stories with objects as a very naïve 14 year old Sunday School teacher. But, most of all, it was the use of the word 'mystery' in the faces of Easter that hit me in the spiritual solar plexus.

Why and when did you become a Godly Play trainer?

I became a trainer in 2002. Rebecca rang me up one day saying 'Jerome wants some trainers in the UK. Do you fancy a trip to Denver and the Rocky Mountains?' Well, what do you say to that? We'd done some work promoting Godly Play in the UK, but if I'm honest we really didn't know that much, so it was a great opportunity to go and find out more, especially from people who'd been doing this for much longer than us.

What do you like best about being a trainer? What really matters to you about this role?

I love the fact that each time we do a course it's with a different group of people. Each person will have a different reason for being there, be it a desire to re-think their children's' work or to explore Godly Play in different settings. But, at the heart of all our courses is *the desire to uphold the importance of childhood spirituality* - that's what really matters to me.



You've been a trainer for a very long time and done so many training courses – looking back, what has surprised you most?

Well, quite simply that people are still coming on courses after nearly 20 years! When we first started we thought that perhaps one or two courses would be it. We had no idea how much interest there would be for something like this.

Then we started to get requests from Finland, Germany and other parts of the world as well. I never thought that I'd spend so much time travelling around the world introducing Godly Play to different cultures. A key principle in Godly Play is to encourage people to take responsibility for their own learning and that was the principle in the work overseas. It has been amazing, and really humbling, to see Godly play thriving now in so many countries.



Can you describe some of your recent work for Godly Play?

Godly Play has become a worldwide movement and currently I am the chair of the 'Godly Play International Council', with delegates from all around the world. Over the past few years we have worked to agree ways that Godly Play and its training can operate in different settings. There are now agreed minimum requirements and best practice for core training, the training of trainers, and the ongoing support of practitioners and trainers. We also advise on setting up new national organization, and, crucially, agreed principles for writing new stories and producing resources.



Although I don't do as many 3 day trainings as before, training new trainers is still a big piece of work, including new overseas trainers. And I'm still committed to creating and monitoring resources for Godly Play, and writing that brings together the ideas behind Godly Play and their practical implications.

Peter, can you tell us about a ‘stand out’ moment in your Godly Play life?

It was whilst leading an early training of trainers in Houston, Texas. One of the trainee trainers became really angry, criticizing way the course focused too much on storytelling.

As a qualified Montessori teacher she reminded us that the main learning is not when the adult ‘teaches’ but rather when the child gets their hands on the materials.

It was a seminal moment for me. Until that point I had judged a good session by the standards of my storytelling and the ability to evoke good wondering! Her anger and frustration helped me see a much wider picture.



And finally what do you see as your specialist contribution to Godly Play UK?

We, and I include myself, can easily be seduced into a consumerist/commodity approach to everything including spirituality. So I guess I’m often the one who asks the awkward question at meetings, to guard against that mindset. Perhaps my role is about trying to remind myself and others of our core principles. After nearly 20 years of Godly Play I guess I do bring quite a wide perspective.

Oh, and don’t forget the play and laughter. There has to be that. It is called Godly Play for a reason, so I am completely committed to the value of play as a deep part of our religious experience.

Bite-sized News Items:

Enjoy the Feast!

Godly Play Videos on our Website

Watching experienced story-tellers is an excellent, and often easier, way to get to know new stories. The Godly Play Foundation has developed its own You Tube channel where you can see many of the stories in Volumes 2, 3 & 4 told by trainers.



Now you can easily access this brilliant resource via the link on the ‘ABOUT’ tab of our Godly Play UK website, in our section entitled ‘Videos’.

Or simply click here <https://www.youtube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn/videos>

(And beware - unofficial internet videos of Godly Play stories are often dreadful!)

More Bite-sized News Items:

Enjoy the Feast!

Godly Play with Home Education Groups

Lead Trainer, Rachel Bainton reports: 'The Godly Play room in St. Nicholas's Cathedral, Newcastle, has started to offer sessions for groups of 'Home Educated' children. In the first session, using The Holy Family, encountering a 'classroom environment' was a novel experience in itself! Consequently some children needed more support to settle in a circle, but once the story started they were really engaged. In response time there was particular interest exploring the story materials, more than the other creative materials. It took me, as a storyteller, a couple of days to discern what the other main difference was – it was quiet! These children had not learnt to raise their voices to be heard.'



HOT OFF THE PRESS! – NEW BOOK :

Godly Play – European Perspectives on Practice and Research Martin Steinhäuser and Rune Øystese (eds)
Waxmann, 2018 ISBN 978-3-8309-3630-5 416 pages, € 39,90 (@ £35.16)

See <https://www.godlyplay.uk/> for limited offer of £24.95 incl.p&p

This book documents the extent of Godly Play across Europe, and explores the diverse impacts and challenges it has for churches and schools in different nations. There are key articles from the UK and Ireland, though some articles are in German with English summaries. A review will be published in our next issue



NEW GODLY PLAY LENDING LIBRARY

The Anglican Diocese of Southwark (which covers Anglican churches in London, South of the Thames and a little of North Surrey) has compiled a library of Godly Play Resources.

These can be lent out to people who have been on Introductory Days and would like to spend some time working with a story or would like to try out telling a story in their context.

See here for further details: www.southwark.anglican.org/cypmm/resourceexchange/

Opportunities 2018: come along or pass it on

Click the links below or see our website for further details

www.godlyplay.uk Enquiries to Sheila.rogers@talktalk.net

- [Sheffield: One Day Introduction](#) 9th March 2018
- [London \(Putney\): One Day Introduction](#) 10th March 2018
- [Sheffield: Training Day in Godly Play with Older People](#) 13th March 2018
- [Sheffield: Going Deeper into Response](#) 16th March 2018
- [Sheffield: Lent Retreat with Christ and the Saints](#) 16-17th March 2018
- [Gosport \(Hampshire\): 3-day Accredited Training](#) 9th-11th April 2018
- [Cambridge: 3-day Accredited Training Course](#) April 21st, May 19th, June 9th 2018
- [Monkseaton \(North Tyneside\): Enrichment Spiritual Retreat](#) 4-6th May 2018
- [Ottershaw \(Surrey\): 3-day Accredited Course](#) 8-10th May 2018
- [Llantarnam Abbey, Wales: 3-day Accredited Training Course](#) 4th-6th July 2018
- [Exeter: 3-day Accredited Training course](#) 24-26th July 2018
- [Didsbury \(Manchester\): 3-day Accredited Training Course](#) 26-28th Sept 2018
- [Ampleforth \(N.Yorks\): 3-day Accredited Training Course](#) 16-18th October 2018

**Thank you for being a special supporter of Godly Play UK.
We hope you have found things in this issue that
encourage and affirm you and your work.**

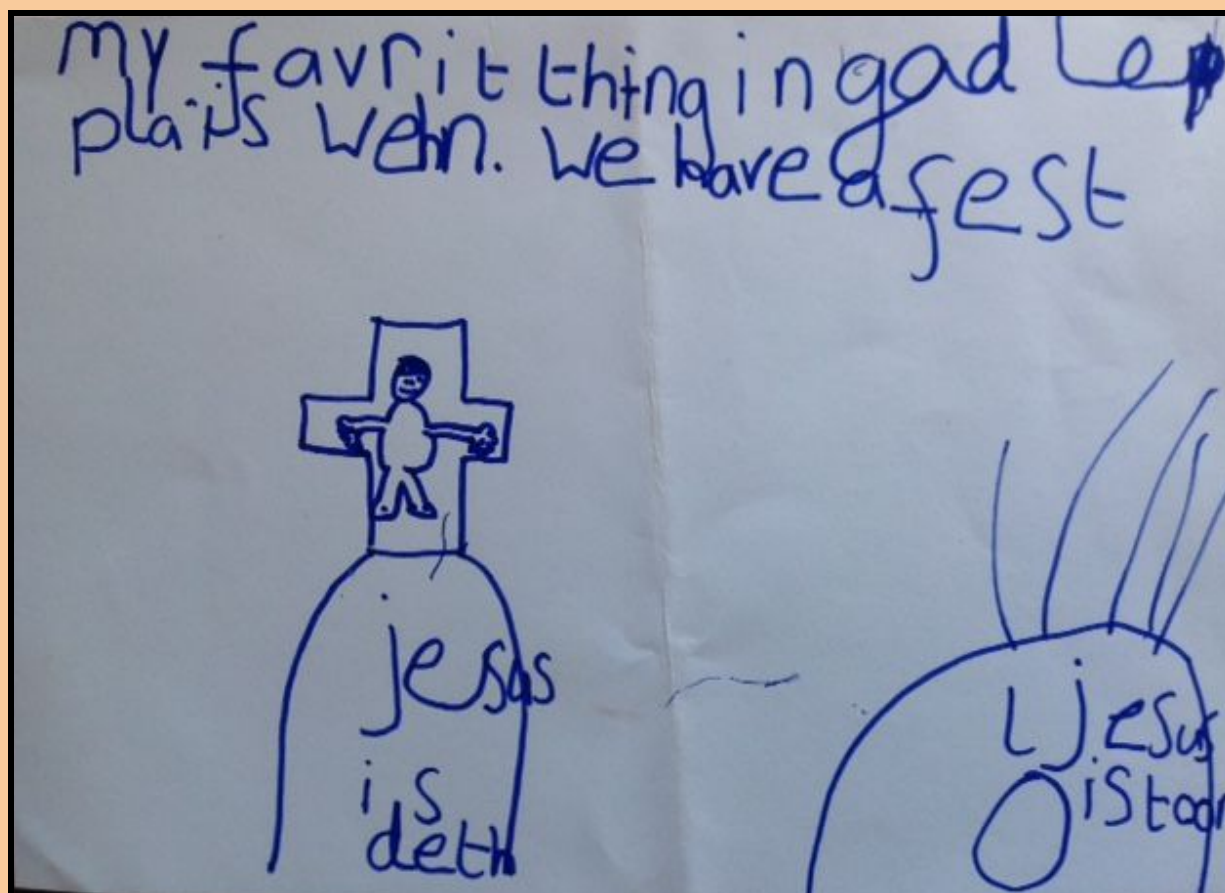


*May the Good Shepherd,
who knows all of the sheep by name,
lead you to the good green grass
and guide you through dangerous times and places.*

*May you find your pearl of great price,
and know that you journey
with all the people of God,*

who are as many as there are stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert.

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



taking childhood spirituality seriously

Godly Play^{UK}

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