

taking childhood spirituality seriously

Godly Play^{UK}

Associates of Godly Play UK

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Editor: Rebecca Nye

At the threshold



Welcome to another issue of the Godly Play Associates magazine, probably with the biggest harvest of items to date. I'll let the contents page speak for itself, but I'd like to express many thanks to those who contribute and special thanks to you, our readers, who make this all worthwhile.

You will be keen to know Godly Play UK's proposals for the support generously pledged through our Associates scheme. Your very generous gifts this year have enabled us to make plans in areas of work that we have not been able to undertake before. Final details are still emerging as, of course, it takes time to lay foundations for new initiatives in new places.

We are going to offer free, or very low-cost, one-day introductory courses in three areas of economic deprivation. These are places where communities are enduring huge challenges and Godly Play could make a real difference to the lives of children and adults as well. At these events we hope to pioneer slightly different ways of training that will encourage people who may not be used to text-based approaches.

We are also planning a three-day course for people training for ministry, many of whom will be going to minister in poor communities. We hope that by offering this at a substantially reduced cost, more leaders will begin to appreciate the importance of understanding childhood spirituality. In particular, it's hoped that this will disseminate Godly Play-infused thinking and practice into worshipping communities and a range of wider encounters. Thank you again for your ongoing support!



Photo Credit : Vitaliy Deynega

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Building the circle: Community News

Adult Retreats using Godly Play

By Rachel Bainton and Sue North-Coombes

In recent months some of our trainers have offered Godly Play retreats for adults. Rachel Bainton and Mary Cooper held weekend retreats in the beautiful residential setting of Shepherds Dene, Newcastle; whilst in her Surrey Godly Play room in the church garden, Sue North Coombes invited adults to shorter retreat sessions, every other week, throughout the year. Read on to find out how these went.



A weekend retreat

Sometimes it can feel hard to be really authentic within the Godly Play process. The phrase 'you have all the time you need' – often said when gently moving a group from their response time to the feast – seems untrue. We don't have all the time we need! We need to clear up, have a feast and say goodbye in time to get back into school, or into the church service. Similarly, time is pressed in the three-day accredited training courses. There is so much to fit in, wondering is sometimes cut short, and response time is limited.

So, imagine a place where the wondering can go on for as long as it needs to; as long as the energy is there. Imagine a place where you can find just the right response material for you, and space, and time, and silence. Where the response time is long enough for big work to be started. And where your response can be parked, and returned to if needed. This is what a Godly Play retreat hopes to offer.



Before our first meal together, we begin to get to know each other, and the venue, and spend time transitioning from our regular lives to this place of retreat. After dinner we have our first Godly Play session, which is slightly adapted. There is the story, a time of wondering, and there is a chance to investigate the response materials. But for this first session, instead of an individual response time, we provide a workshop to help to build our new circle and also to give people ideas about different ways to use some of the response materials. Finally we come together for prayer.

Over the next two days we have four more full sessions, and another optional workshop in the evening. There is also free time. We share meals together, and maybe also walks. There is time for fellowship and space for individual reflection. Some of what we do on retreat doesn't follow a model Godly Play session, but what it absolutely has is authenticity, and you can have all the time that you need. In fact my favourite moment at the last retreat came at the end of the first full response time. With well over an hour for individual response, I'd had time to engage with the work I needed to start. But I still felt irritated to have to stop what I was doing to re-join the circle. It was wonderful to acknowledge that feeling, and to know that ahead of me were more spacious response times.

Weekday retreats



Meanwhile, in Surrey, over the course of a whole year, 'The Wayfarers' offered another way to retreat with Godly Play. A group of 17 adults journeyed together fortnightly, some meeting in the daytime, others in the evenings. Twelve made it right through to the end. All felt like pilgrims and those who had to stop part way had still journeyed a long way and left reluctantly.

Each Godly Play session was an hour and a half long and over the year the Wayfarers wandered through all the core stories in turn and season. They grew comfortable and evolved their own way of being together; from the floor, they progressed to chairs with cushions on the seat and at their feet; two even told a story. From heading straight for the security of books in the

response time, most tried out response materials, and the labyrinth when the weather was warm, although evening travellers often preferred just to keep on wondering! One brought wood carving tools and continued a 10-year project of whittling an innkeeper to add to a Holy Family set; another began a personal reflective diary, completed just as the course ended.

Did we have all the time we needed? In one sense, no; each session could have stretched to three hours easily. Yet in another sense, yes. We became aware gradually that we were all on a pilgrimage together quite outside time, and our work in that place continued with us as we left. We meet for a final meal together soon and then a retreat day, at which point, perhaps, we'll be ready to greet the 'beginning to every ending...'



Visiting Bowthorpe: home of Godly Play resources

By Dani Redhead

Dani is a Godly Play trustee who is part of the Resources Committee, taking care of the partnership between Godly Play UK and the Bowthorpe Community Trust where Godly Play resources are made.



In a bright room overlooking the ruins of a medieval church, a group of people are seated around a large table. Small wooden objects are being painted, waxed, sanded and glued. From another room comes the gentle hum of fretsaws, sanding machines and a laser cutter, hard at work. The smell of freshly-cut wood fills the air. I'm in the outskirts of Norwich, to meet with colleagues from the Godly Play Resources Committee. We're looking at materials for the newer Godly Play stories and we've

met at St Michael's Workshop, Bowthorpe - the workshop from which all UK Godly Play materials originate.

Over lunch, I chat to the workshop trainees. Among them are people with Down's syndrome, those with autistic traits, others with learning difficulties and those who are registered blind. Paul, who was born without eyes, has been coming to Bowthorpe for twenty years. He tells me his time at the workshop has been life-changing. David, who is waxing apples for the second Creation story, agrees. Beaming with pride, he says 'We make stories that are in the Bible!'



It is striking that so many of the trainees have been coming here for years – some since the Workshop's inception in 1984. There is a strong sense of purpose and community.



Bob, the centre manager, confirms this, 'No trainee has ever left because they don't want to be here, only because they have moved away or retired. Godly Play is the perfect match for the workshop because of the diversity of the products that need making. It means we can be adaptable. If someone develops arthritis and finds sanding tricky, then they might choose to move on to oiling products or painting. Nobody is ever asked to do something they don't want to do. There is so much scope to utilise

everyone's skills and they really enjoy their work.'



That much is evident. Laughter, rapport and a sense of purpose fill the workshop as we share lunch. Linda, one of the volunteers, an Occupational Therapist, sums up what makes Bowthorpe such a special place for her: 'While we are a Day Centre what I love about the workshop is that it is a productive place. A place of purpose – not just a place, like so many, of activities with no outcome. The products give the trainees great joy and their work goes across the world! It is

amazing!' There is a murmur of agreement, with Bob concurring, 'For many people with disabilities who live in care settings, they can struggle to feel they have their own identity. Bowthorpe gives a strong sense of being part of a valued workforce and a strong sense of community.' Time and again the word 'family' is mentioned. One of our group, Liz, looks wistful, 'My foster son came here for a year. It was the only successful employment of his life, and he is now fifty. So many people are rootless, but the roots here run really deep.'



St Michael's does indeed have a long history. Starting almost 35 years ago from a small double garage with the aim of helping people with learning difficulties and physical disadvantages develop their full potential, in 1993 the workshop moved to its present location opposite the ruins of St Michael's and All Angels, adjacent to Bowthorpe Church. It was around this time that Liz Cannon (see page 7) became a voluntary church assistant at St Michael's School, and through her connection with Rebecca Nye, Bowthorpe began making materials for Godly Play. It is now one of the very few workshops worldwide that has received a licence to make official Godly Play materials, and it is clear why Jerome Berryman was so taken with the workshop when he visited in 2004. There is much alignment with the ethos of the workshop and that of Godly Play.



The workshop aims to embody the principle of caring for and appreciating our greatest 'gifts' – the gift of people and the gifts of the earth. The trainees are given the time and space they need to do their work. Care is taken to make sure that all the products are non-toxic including the oils used for finishing, that quality control is high and that packaging is biodegradable or from waste materials (have you received a package wrapped in off-cuts of felt?). Bob laughs as he holds up an artefact for the tabernacle,

explaining 'We tried five different types of bronze paint before we were happy with it. If my grandkids got one of these I want to feel they are safe playing with it!'

One in four of the workshop's orders now comes from overseas, some from as far away as Australia and Hong Kong. Many of the overseas orders tend to be large, and this can make managing the workshop a challenge. Bob is adamant that the trainees must be given the time they need to do their work, in their way, without feeling pressurized, but he is also conscious that people don't expect to have to wait for an 'internet shopping order'. In fact, there is such demand for their work that Bob is toying with the idea



of increasing the workshop's operating days from four to five, but he is cautious. In reality, he confides, the workshop is about the trainees' needs, and not financial gains. It is a fine balance, and he does not wish to overburden the people who give so much to the workshop. The complexity of managing each trainee's needs and individual budgets, which have to be negotiated with the Council, is in itself an ongoing struggle. Bob sighs as he explains that most trainees no longer have individual social workers and that funding for transportation has been cut in many cases. One of the trainees tells us how his Dad has to bring him now, since his taxi was stopped, and that he sometimes feels desperate if he thinks he might no longer be able to come to the workshop.

It is easy to feel helpless and despondent on hearing these stories. Especially as they contrast so sharply with the hope, optimism and purpose that pervades the workshop. But hopefully the local council will realise the benefits derived for trainees coming to a place where they feel valued and productive. As I leave, I wish that more people could visit the workshop for themselves and experience what a special place it is.

Catching up with friends...



Rev'd Liz Cannon was one of the first Trustees of Godly Play UK and still serves as a Trustee today. Her story, as told to Gill Ambrose, shines a light not only on one of our most loyal friends, but also on the evolving hard work of the Trustees.

I first experienced Godly Play on the floor of the London HQ of the Mothers' Union in 1999, as Jerome Berryman took out from his suitcase some stories buried amongst his clothes. Rebecca Nye had recently returned from a conference in the USA so wildly enthusiastic about this thing called 'Godly Play' that I remember fearing that it might be some sort of cult! But the encounter with Jerome won me over completely.

How has Godly Play changed you?

During ordination training I did a study about pre-school children's spirituality supervised by Rebecca, then later I did the three-day training. In those three days I felt I learnt more about being a priest than I'd learned in my three-year theological training. This is not meant as a criticism of ordination training, rather that Godly Play training was completely transformational in terms of my understanding of priesthood. I realised Godly Play principles could inform every part of my work, not only work with children.

Why did you become a Trustee of Godly Play UK?

The way Godly Play grew and started to take root in those first few years was amazing. However it was also fragile and precarious. The responsibility for the work depended heavily on Rebecca and Peter Privett, who both gave up paid employment to grow the movement. That is why a charitable trust was set up to support and encourage the work of Godly Play in the UK, and to give it a sustainable financial basis.

What are you most proud of?

I am most proud of my part in initiating and developing the relationship with St Michael's Workshop at Bowthorpe near Norwich, where Godly Play resources are made. For many years I coordinated the Resources Group. This meant communicating with the Workshop to develop a very creative partnership between both charities.

How has Godly Play challenged you?

In 2014 I had a Sabbatical, and as part of that I spent a month at the ecumenical study centre of Tantur just outside Bethlehem. I wanted to explore telling the story of the Israel/Palestine conflict in a Godly Play way, and I was able to speak with Palestinians and Israelis. From this I created a story in the Godly Play style called 'Where Walls Divide'.

***Why does Godly Play need to be run by a Trust?***

As a Trustee, it has been a real joy to see the number of trainers grow and to see the establishment of Godly Play advocates right across the country. But all this development needs to be paid for, and to be done in a sustainable way. That strategic oversight is the responsibility of the Trustees. It is good to have been in on this from the start and to have seen how it has grown.

If you would like to know more about Liz's Godly Play style story about the Israel/Palestine conflict, you can contact her at rev-liz@btconnect.com

Advocates News

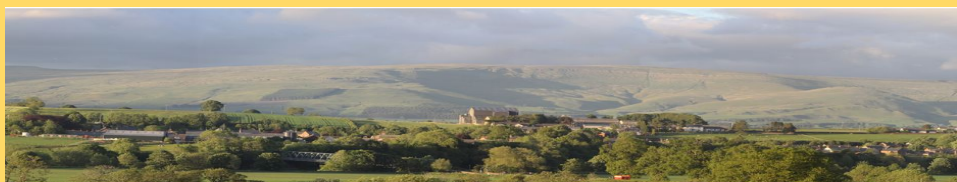
By Mary Cooper



As ever, huge thanks go to all our advocates working hard to promote Godly Play in many and various ways throughout the U.K. In this issue we're delighted to feature Hazel Scott Bowes, an advocate based near Penrith. The North is a vast region to cover for Newcastle-based trainers Rachel Bainton and I, so along with two other advocates in other Northern areas, Hazel makes all the difference to Godly Players in North East Cumbria.

Hazel became involved after a Godly Play room was set up in a small Methodist church, and she was instrumental in relocating it when that became necessary. Now part of a joint Methodist-Anglican mission community, this base provides tasters to groups throughout the county of Cumbria and beyond. Local schools in this area also benefit, either by coming to the Godly Play room or by Godly Play coming to their school. Hazel supports a termly network meeting and maintains a network of local practitioners. She's also invaluable when preparing for three-day training courses held in Lazonby and Kirkoswald.

Hazel explains her advocate role and vision: 'Advocating for Godly Play in rural Cumbria is challenging, with scattered communities, difficult cross-county communications and where we have only one designated Godly Play space. My vision is to have Godly Play hubs established in three more areas of the county: North centred north of Carlisle; on the West coast; and South around Kendal/Ulverston, to encourage and nurture the 40 plus folks who have either trained or had exposure to Godly Play'.



Asked about a recent good moment in her advocate work, Hazel recalled an exchange between a boy with severe behavioural issues and a helper as they walked from the local school to the Godly Play room. The boy said, 'I do like Godly Play...they tell the story quietly and slowly and it makes the back of my head tingle'. Hazel recalls, 'We never had problems [with him], but some deep work'.

If you think you could offer voluntary assistance as an advocate to promote Godly Play in any part of the UK, please contact our Advocates Coordinator, Mary Cooper, at cooper.mary@blueyonder.co.uk. There further information what being an advocate involves at <https://www.godlyplay.uk/practitioners/advocates/>

Feature Article 1

School Godly Play : Pupils' Impressions and Teacher Insights

By Steph Packham

Steph Packham is a newly-trained school teacher and currently a Children and Families Worker for Sampford Peverell Team Mission Community. Here she enthusiastically describes a short project where she offered a Godly Play session to every child in the school, making clear how much this approach impacts on her as a teacher. Crucially however, Stephanie's article records what the pupils thought about different aspects of their Godly Play experience. Their perspective seems to be that even when it is only a 'one-off' encounter, children in schools find Godly Play worthwhile in all kinds of ways.

'It was very relaxing, peaceful and good.'
'It felt free and thoughtful in the room.'
'It felt like being in a different school.'

It was pupil comments such as these, from a project at Sampford Peverell School, that got me thinking about the impact Godly Play can have in a primary school setting. There was something wonderful happening for me and for the children, and I hope that you get that sense too, as you read this article.



Since completing the three-day accredited Godly Play day training course I knew that Godly Play was special. As a newly-trained teacher, I consider myself lucky to be trained in the most up to date teaching methods available, and I'd been blessed in having supportive, inspiring university lecturers and encouraged to foster a sense of awe and wonder in those I would teach. Yet I had left university pondering. I had a feeling that there was a gap in my repertoire of teaching methods, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what that was. Now I know what that gap was, for me it was Godly Play.

Godly Play as a technique is fantastic. And as a way of introducing children to religious education, of encouraging a contemplative approach and as a way of nurturing spiritual development it is simply amazing. Captivating from the start, the stories themselves are so beautifully written with every line having a purpose, every phrase encouraging a growth mindset. Godly Play draws you in and keeps you hooked.



'I felt relaxed when the story was being told.'

'I learnt that when you relax your imagination goes wild.'

But what was most striking in my project was how the children themselves noticed that they were experiencing something different to their traditional classroom teaching. The process of Godly Play simply and beautifully sets the scene for something special to happen. The children

get this sense from the tone of the Godly Play practitioner, from the pace of the session and from the quality of the equipment used throughout. It all feels special.

Yet the logistics of piecing together a Godly Play project is really quite an unremarkable process. This particular project was completed over a six-week period. Every child in the school experienced a session lasting 1 hour. The children came to the session in their year groups with no more than 15 children in one session. The sessions were held in the school hall. A teaching assistant accompanied each group. The only other adults in attendance were the Godly Play Storyteller (me) and the Doorperson. Everyone had the same story: The Great Family.

So what was it that made this project so rich and memorable? The answer lies with the children's responses during and after the sessions, including the manner in which they responded. The Great Family story is challenging and there is no shying away from the big messages. Yet somehow the atmosphere in the room was one of openness and safety. So much so that the children appeared comfortable expressing their opinions with a joyous sense of freedom.

And later, when asked what it felt like to attend the Godly Play session responses included:

What did you like about Godly Play?

'It felt good because people have different views about the story.'

'Good because you didn't need to fake a response.'

'Like everything was right and nothing was wrong.'

'It felt nice that we could speak freely about what we thought.'

'It makes me feel that none of my answers can be wrong.'

'That everyone could respond in a different way.'

'It felt great because we have lots of different ways of thinking.'

'It was good because we have our own beliefs and they can't be wrong.'

'Good because everyone got to say what they thought or what questions they had.'

'Great; no one judges you because it was your own way, no one else's.'

'It gave us time to think.'



But it goes even deeper than that. There is something transfixing about the pace of Godly Play. For some children in the typical classroom, the pace can be so fast that the answer has been given before they have even processed the question. However in Godly Play sessions time just seems to slow down. The busyness of the school day is put to one side and the mind calms. It seems to create a head space that enables growth in remarkable ways.

And when asked what they had learned from the Godly Play session, pupil's answers were so much more profound and varied than a purely factual response such as 'I learned a new Bible story about Abraham and Sarah'.

What did you learn?

'That friendship is really important in your family.'

'I learnt how to be very calm.'

'I learnt about the great family of God and we are all a part of it.'

'I learnt how peace is important.'

'We learnt to not stop trying and to always try again.'

'I learnt that God is always with me.'

'I learnt that our opinions about the Bible can't be right or wrong.'

'God is always with you and is everywhere.'

'That you should wonder.'

'That stories in the Bible can have multiple messages.'

'That different Christians tell stories in different ways.'

'I learnt that God is always with you no matter where you are.'

As a teacher, it was fascinating to observe just how inclusive Godly Play is. It seemed to work regardless of the age of the children and their academic ability; no differentiation was needed. It seemed to fall outside of the constraints of 'right and wrong' so prevalent in many traditional lessons. Importantly, pupils explicitly noticed this too:

'I liked the story because we could all join in.'

'It teaches us to value everybody's opinion.'

'I noticed that each person had a different perspective.'

From the outset the children were aware that there was no expectation to say or do anything. The relief was palpable. I thought about how freeing for the mind that must be for a child. So refreshing perhaps that it enables your mind to take you wherever it wants to take you rather than being pulled along by a teaching 'expert'.

The story time seemed to open the mind to free thinking, but the response time seemed to take this to the next level. For some children it awakened a sense of spirituality, self-awareness and a curiosity about how and when our faith and our daily life meet.

Thoughts about Response Time

'Good because we get to express anything we want.'

'It was nice because I didn't have to do something that I didn't want to do.'

'I felt free and it felt like you could make anything you want.'

'It was so quiet because you could make what you wanted.'

'It felt good to respond in different ways because you could respond in a prayer.'

'It felt good to respond in any way you wanted because if you thought they showed kindness you could make something to do with that.'



For me however, the power and beauty of Godly Play is really encapsulated in the freedom the children are given to wonder. So often in teaching, a child has to finish one lesson and quickly move onto the next without time to consolidate and permission to question. Not so in Godly Play. Instead the children are encouraged to carry on thinking, even when the session has finished and all has been packed away. I was so amazed to see in their evaluation forms just how much the children had continued with their wondering weeks after their Godly Play session had finished. Their own ongoing wondering was rich, varied and totally inspiring.

Pupils' ongoing wondering, even weeks later

'Why did Abraham and Sarah move around so much?'

'I wonder if there are any more stories about them?'

'I wonder how many miles Abraham and Sarah walked?'

'How old was Isaac when he got married?'

'I wonder if Abraham's body is still in the same place in the ground?'

'I wonder why God changed their names?'

'I wonder if I will learn another story about people's names changing?'

'I wonder if Jesus told the story to His Disciples?'

'I wonder how long it took for them to find Rebecca?'

'I wonder if Abraham and Isaac are in any other stories?'

'I wonder how old Abraham and Sarah were when they died?'

'I wonder why the story was set in the desert?'

'I wonder if you took a grain of sand away would someone in your family die?'

'Where is God?'

'If God created everything, who created God?'

'Has God got omniscient vision?'

'Is God a person?'

So would I run Godly Play in a primary school again? Absolutely, and I would encourage others to do it too! But don't take my word for it. The children articulate it so much better than me:

'I would like to do it again so that we can have time to relax and think more'

'I'd like to do it again because you get to have time to yourself'

'I would like to do it again because it helps me to learn more about God'

'Again please because it extends your learning about different beliefs and your own beliefs'

Steph would like to thank Ms McCulloch, the R.E. lead at Sampford Peverell School for enabling this project to happen and for inviting her back into school next year for another Godly Play project.

Listening more...



Steph Packham's article above gives prominent place to what children have to say, and how much more she learnt by listening carefully. Listening is a clearly a key to taking childhood spirituality seriously. Indeed many studies have found that children are disheartened that no one really listens, which can lead to a gradual devaluation and silencing of spiritual experiences, thoughts and habits of childhood altogether.

Godly Play strives to be a practice which embeds a 'listening culture' in every step of the process - from the threshold onwards. And by valuing children's verbal and non-verbal expression, Godly Play encourages us to listen not only with our ears, but with open eyes, minds and hearts also.

So, in future issues there will be a dedicated space to share more examples which encourage us to listen reflectively to what children have to say about, or in, Godly Play. If you would like to contribute something you've seen or heard, and you have the child's permission, please send it to rebecca@godlyplay.uk

The photo above of 'the Boy in the Temple' is from Peter Privett's 'Faces of Easter' series. This is available for purchase from Bowthorpe <https://shop.stmichaelsworkshop.com/>

Feature Article 2

‘I Wonder....’ A summer holiday club in a village church.

By Judy Yeomans

At three-day courses people often ask ‘How much can I adapt Godly Play to fit in with different events or activities?’ Judy Yeomans has been using Godly Play for over eight years, and is now an accredited trainer, so she was well equipped to make carefully informed decisions about adaptations for a summer holiday club that tried to preserve everything Godly Play really needs.

On a flight heading home from the European conference in Riga, a few tired but excited delegates from Sussex imagined a different kind of holiday club. We had, at various times been part of this staple ingredient of children’s ministry in our own churches: the summer holiday scheme, where we’d entertained large numbers of children over several days with music, games, drama, craft and story in an effort to show them a loving God and His good news. What most of us had grown used to was a hectic week of activity, one of the biggest events in the calendar, but sometimes we were left asking ourselves if the ‘fast food’ style of content and delivery always suited us or the children we served.



We wondered:

Could we do something different, using Godly Play?

Could a group of children’s workers from across the county work together to serve a church that doesn’t have the resources to run a holiday club on its own?

Could we help a church to envisage a new way of inviting children into the big story of God’s love for everyone?

Might this give insight into a different way of working and inject some fresh inspiration and energy into the children’s team?

Over the coming year Sussex Godly Play Network member Louise Clark and the PCC at St Peter’s Church in Henfield invited us to plan a 3-day holiday club for 5-11yr olds. Our aim was to offer a comprehensive experience of the best that Godly Play can offer; time

and space set aside for us to come close to God, to wonder about who God is and about the stories of God's people, in ways that would be active, creative and child-led.



The club was led by four experienced storytellers/doorpersons for whom this was their sole role throughout the three days. This allowed us to focus on building the circle and community and maintain the principles of Godly Play. Also it helped that these principles were communicated in advance to our additional volunteers, most of whom had seen some Godly Play in their children's work or in a family service, so there was common ground in terms of respecting the children's autonomy.

We met several times to plan the timetable and agree a programme of stories, but there was much we could do remotely to prepare ourselves as storytellers and doorpersons. Unlike other holiday clubs where many different elements and activities have to be painstakingly prepared, it seemed to us that this groundwork was more personal and about getting ready to invite children into a time and place of discovery. This was more enriching for us and we hoped it would be so for the children too.

Using six core Godly Play presentations we devised a focus on Christ's presence from the light in the world at Creation, moving through a sweep of Old Testament journeys of discovery. Then the parables of the Good Shepherd and Mustard Seed followed to help us look at what the Kingdom of God might really be like and we finished with how we carry a part of that light ourselves when we are baptised.

With the benefit of a large church building we were able to divide a group of 20 children into two groups, using the (side) transepts to gather them into their circles. We were keen to keep the circles small enough to maximise intimacy and involvement and would probably cap the number in each circle at 15, depending on the age range and needs of the children, which could be established in advance.

Using the central nave for the creative response time, all the children came together to find their own choice of activity from a wide selection of art, craft, and construction materials and work areas. The children expressed great pleasure at taking their time to work on what they wanted to do, having over 45 minutes to continue their own wondering in private or talking to the respectfully-attentive volunteers. Some children picked up the same piece of work in consecutive response times, one child spending more than 2 hours on a single piece of artwork.



Originally we'd hoped to offer two full Godly Play sessions in a morning but changed this to focus on crossing the threshold and building the circle followed by the story, wondering and response. Mid-morning, after the response time, children were invited to go outside to play and enjoy a drink and snack before coming back for a second story. We noticed that some time for being outside, chatting and playing was needed. After the second response time they returned to the circle for the day's 'goodbye' from the storyteller before receiving a personal blessing from the vicar as they left. Most of the children were known to the vicar or children's leader through their involvement with the local primary school.

Over the three days we witnessed increasing confidence in the children's questions and responses to the presentations. There were some moments of revelation and sadness as children were clearly touched by the stories or made connections with their own life experiences. At the end of the second morning one child looked excitedly out into the group as he shared his discovery that the story of the people receiving the Ten Best Ways to Live and the parable of the Good Shepherd were both about being shown the right way to go! One child, whose doll had patiently spent two days with the doorpersion, offered it to be used in the presentation of Holy Baptism. Another child eagerly told of how she was waiting to be baptized, after seeing the presentation and being shown the font and receiving a blessing from the vicar, Paul Doick. If we extended the club to four mornings we would probably vary the format on the last day, perhaps taking the children to a new venue, spending more time outside, exploring the possibility of a collective response for a display or participating in a longer lunch-time with families.



Connecting a holiday club to the everyday life of the church and the worship of the people there can sometimes be difficult. Having the clergy, Paul and Harriet on the team, to pray for the children at the start of the day, offer a blessing as they left and to share some of the mystery of baptism at the font helped to engender belonging, relationship and familiarity. Indeed, the whole experience drew us all closer together as a community of fellow pilgrims.

You can write to Judy for more information at judyisyeomans@gmail.com. Judy would like to thank Fiona Prentice, Alison Day, Louise Clark and Chris Wheatley from the Sussex Godly Play Network who collaborated in this work.

In the USA, Godly Play has been used this summer for 'Vacation Bible School' - rather like a holiday club. Use this link to see some great pictures of their outdoor Godly Play room

<https://www.facebook.com/108549225831674/posts/2066001283419782/>

Taking your wondering further...

Creating Space for Godly Play in North Ormesby

By Heather Black

It is now 12 years since a Godly Play room was created at Holy Trinity Church, North Ormesby. Heather Black, who became a Godly Play trainer in 2010, tells the story of how it came into being and the difference it has made.

North Ormesby is an urban parish near the Centre of Middlesbrough, which is ranked as the second poorest parish in England. Child poverty is 64%, the highest level in the country, and there are many challenges for children growing up in this neighbourhood. My husband, the Rev'd Dominic Black, and I came to the parish in 2004. There were no children in the church and no real links with the local community primary school, which was experiencing a very difficult time.

We wanted to offer something good for the children of the parish, something that we hoped would nurture them, and provide a safe space for them to discover more about themselves, about community and about God. We had both experienced Godly Play in other settings and so shared our vision to develop Godly Play with the church PCC. We inspired them in the best possible way, by letting them experience Godly Play, which they loved! They agreed if we were going to introduce Godly Play, we wanted to do so with the best we could offer. They decided to dedicate a meeting room to be converted into a Godly Play space, with all the upheaval and changes this would mean.



This was an ambitious and faith-filled commitment; we had no children in the church and no money to make it happen. However, over the coming months, as we were thinking and praying for this vision, a parishioner who had been a Sunday School

teacher for 40 years, died. The small legacy she gave to the church was to be used for the 'spiritual nurture of the children of North Ormesby.' This was our first experience of 'wonder' that God had come close to us and provided all that we needed.

We did a lot of the physical work ourselves to keep costs low and created a beautiful space for Godly Play. We couldn't afford to buy all the stories, so built them up over time, some stories were home-made initially, harnessing the skills of creative people in the church. Over time, the room has been used as a training venue, bringing in some income, which has allowed us to create a full set of resources.



In 2007 we applied for a 'Green Spaces' grant to create a beautiful Cloister garden in what was the old burned down church next to the Godly Play room. The beauty of the garden enhanced the beauty of the room, so that we could offer a truly 'special space' in the heart of North Ormesby. Visitors to our church are always amazed to find such beauty and peace.

Our Godly Play room was opened in December 2006. We invited the school RE coordinator and her response to experiencing Godly Play was, 'Please can I bring my children?' This was the beginning of our Godly Play journey, for eight years we welcomed children from the local community primary school each week for Godly Play, with Year 2 pupils having a full year of Godly Play. Sadly this ended when the school became an academy, but children who came through school still come on a Sunday and remember the stories even though they are now in secondary school!

These days we enjoy the sound of children and families in our church. On many Sundays, when we have a wide range of ages, cultures and languages, we are so thankful for Godly Play. We have a very transient population of families moving in and out of the community, with a growing number of families seeking asylum. Godly Play allows all of the children to enter a special place and belong to a community, where stories are shared in a way that can be enjoyed even if you can't speak English.

Soon after it opened, the story of our Godly Play room began to spread. Many people from churches and schools across the region came to be trained, so as a result thousands of children have experienced Godly Play. Like the parable of the mustard seed, our tiny seed of faith has grown beyond anything we could have imagined.

Many wonderful things have happened in the past twelve years, but the thing that has stood out over and over again, has been the significance of the space we created and the beauty and freedom local children experience there. Whilst working with a Year 2 class, one child said 'I can hear the voice of the Good Shepherd when I am in the Godly Play room.' The conversation continued... could he hear the Good Shepherd in the

stories? No, he said emphatically ‘I can hear his voice all the time in the Godly Play room...in everything.’

The children of our parish live in a harsh, urban environment and they face many challenges in their everyday lives. The Godly Play room has become a safe space where the children can enjoy the stories, explore what the story is saying to them, make connections with their own lives, and somehow discover the Good Shepherd is here with us too.



We are fortunate to have our Godly Play room, which feels very important in a community with little green space, surrounded by boarded-up windows, razor wire and graffiti. We knew when we created the room we wanted it to be a beautiful, safe space. I think we are still discovering what that means, and learning to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in all that we do.

Reviews: Books to take your wondering further...

Reviews by Sheena Williams and Sue North-Coombes



Godly Play - European Perspectives on Practice and Research Martin Steinhauser and Rune Øystese (eds) (2018)
Munster: Waxmann

I wonder how far Godly Play has travelled and whether the travelling is good? I wonder where Godly Play is being studied and enjoyed? This book begins to answer some of these questions from a European perspective but also poses many more questions of its own.

Part of this book's appeal lies in its history. The day before the European Godly Play Conference in Riga in September 2016, an 'academic day' was held. This book came from the desire to share the learning from that day with a wider audience.

It is an edited collection of papers and essays from academics and Godly Play practitioners from 17 countries. This means that each contribution can be read as a stand-alone chapter, and the whole book does not have to be read from cover to cover. The book is clearly organised so that readers can start with the chapters that interest them most, and there is a variety of genres of writing – some chapters are more typical of academic papers and others are stories from practitioners about their experience

and practice. Altogether these diverse chapters paint a fascinating picture of Godly Play in church and educational practice, and also in academic research.

The book is bilingual in English and German to the extent that some of the chapters appear in full in both languages, and that where that is not the case, a short summary in one language prefaces a chapter written in the other, making the most of the content accessible to all. This was both a strength and a frustration to this reader who found herself wishing she had applied herself more in German lessons at school! However, I found having perspectives from outside Godly Play's native Anglophone environment to be enriching and stimulating.

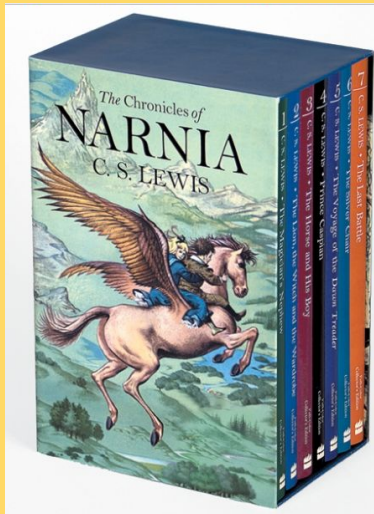
The languages in which the book is written immediately gives the reader a clue as to where Godly Play is most widely established, but near the beginning of the book there are a series of 'country reports' showing how Godly Play is being received and practiced. In an introduction to this section, Peter Privett helpfully draws out some common themes around how Godly Play arrives and begins to grow (or not) in a new place, and it was encouraging to see the number of countries represented, not only across Europe but also around the globe. Translation into another language and culture brings a variety of challenges to Godly Play and as the method makes a home in new places, it will be interesting to follow whether it is robust enough to adapt and still remain Godly Play – something that would lend itself well to future academic research.

Towards the end of the book there are more stories from practitioners in a wide variety of settings which will resonate with and encourage many engaged in Godly Play. However, there is encouragement for all practitioners to see themselves as engaged in something worthy of academic research and to consider how Godly Play might be studied and brought to the attention of a wider audience. Examples of such research are varied. Jerome Berryman's chapter outlines his own research in the process of developing Godly Play and he asserts that it is now mature enough to be an object of study in its own right – 2018 marks a 'soft closure' for Godly Play which he hopes will keep its creativity balanced with the integrity of the method. A number of thoughtful contributions follow from researching practitioners, some of which are methodological, whilst others explore the underlying theological assumptions in Godly Play or the power of storytelling from a theological perspective.



Those chapters which might be considered as more academic in style and substance are nonetheless very readable and give an insight into the contribution that academic research into Godly Play might make to its ongoing growth and development. I wondered if any part of the book could be left out and we'd still have all the story that we need, but I concluded that every part was a great pearl.

Sheena Williams is priest-in-charge of the Parish of North Stoneham and Bassett.



The Chronicles of Narnia C.S.Lewis (2015) Harper Collins
Box Set £34.99 rrp

Have you ever put together C.S Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Godly Play*? Probably familiar books to many of you, I knew of only one as a child and treasured it until, as a twenty year old student, I discovered C.S. Lewis as a writer - and six other Narnia books. The fact that I now know them almost by heart and rate them in the few books that still influence my thinking suggests that, either I never really grew up or that they continue to speak powerfully to all ages. I am happy with the first explanation but I actually believe the latter to be true.

Lewis seems to have a deep understanding of childhood spirituality and experience. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the old Professor is dealing with the older children's concerns about Lucy's story of having visited Narnia through the wardrobe.

'But do you really mean sir,' said Peter, 'that there could be other worlds.....like that?' 'Nothing is more probable', said the Professor taking off his spectacles and beginning to polish them, while he muttered to himself, 'I wonder what they *do* teach them at these schools.' He does not dismiss Lucy's experience, rather he allows the possibility of it being true and valid.

The portrayal of elusive Aslan the Lion, the King of Narnia, also seems so attuned to the vivid, deep ways of knowing that childhood makes possible. Beaver is the first to mention Aslan to the children, telling them that 'Aslan is on the move' and then the narrator explains, 'And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something that you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning - either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get back into that dream again.'

I have given *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to children in my *Godly Play* group on special occasions like first communion and confirmation. I have just put a set of Narnia books in our GP room. Somehow they seem to fit just right.

Sue North-Coombes has been a trainer based in Surrey since 2010.

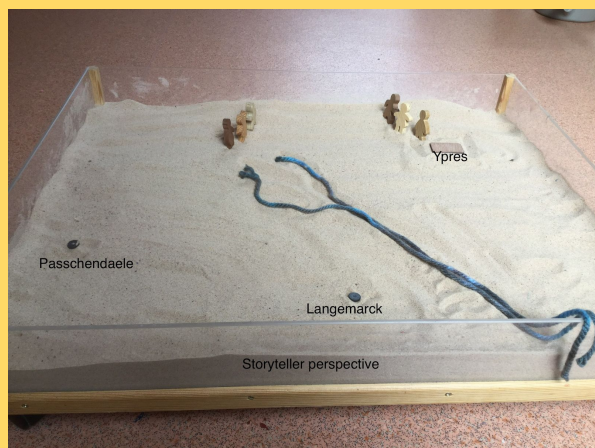
The Feast

In this issue's Feast section there's an opportunity to enjoy closer fellowship with Sheffield-based trainer Kathryn Lord, but we are also blessed by something our Gloucestershire-based trainer Alison Summerskill has brought to share.

Remembrance: A Godly Play Style Presentation

By Alison Summerskill

Alison completed the process of 'accredited trainer training' last November, during which she was invited to prepare a short act of worship for the trainee's course. As her turn was on Remembrance Day, Alison developed a powerful Godly Play style presentation about this, which she is pleased to share with you all.



<p>Materials needed: Six people of God. Desert box or bag. Red/White silk petals (optional). Other items in the accompanying photographs are to show you the positions of the places. They are not needed to tell the story.</p>	
	<p>There was once a great war. Even though there had been wars before and there have been wars since, it is still called The Great War.</p>

	<p>It started because both sides thought they could win, and win quickly. It would be over by Christmas. Each side thought God was fighting for them.</p>
<p><i>Draw a square in the sand for Ypres.</i></p> <p><i>Mark 2 spots in the sand for Langemarck and Passchendaele.</i></p> <p><i>Mark a channel for the River Steen.</i></p>	<p>Here is part of the war, called the Western Front. Here is the great old city of Ypres, here the villages and farms of Passchendaele and Langemarck. There were more places than just these, but these will help us to remember.</p>
<p><i>Place 3 people of God to the left of Ypres (the German army) by Passchendaele.</i></p> <p><i>Place 3 people in Ypres (the Allied Army).</i></p>	<p>The people of Ypres did not even want to go to war, but war came to them.</p>
	<p>The land was fertile and green. It fed the people and their animals.</p>
<p><i>Rub out the edges of Ypres, the river, and scuff the sand across the bag.</i></p>	<p>Soon shells destroyed the fields and shattered the pipes the farmers had laid to drain water from the land. The banks of the river were broken down. Even the leaves and branches on the trees were destroyed.</p>
<p><i>'Dig' trenches and tunnels in the sand, using the figures in each army to push the sand to form rectangles and paths as they move towards each other.</i></p>	<p>The land was also flat and without places to hide, so the soldiers dug trenches where they could shelter from the bullets. Each side tunneled towards the other. Sometimes they were so close they could hear one another but even that did not stop the fighting.</p>

Use your hands to show the rain.	In the summer of 1917 it began to rain. Water came down from the heavens and up from the earth. It rained and rained. The puddles became rivers and flooded the trenches. The fields that used to grow food for the people and the animals became a muddy swamp.
Lie down a soldier in each army.	It was a terrible time. Many people and animals died.
Move the two surviving soldiers from each army to the edge of the sand to front left and right. Leave the dead soldiers where they have fallen. Mark Ypres, Passchendaele and Langemarck in the sand again.	Eventually the fighting stopped, the guns fell silent. The war was over. The soldiers could go home. The people of Ypres and Passchendaele and Langemarck could go home too, and rebuild their city and farms and houses.
	But nothing was the same as before the Great War. Great monuments were built to remind people of war. The dead of both sides were buried in cemeteries that stretched for miles. The soldiers who did not die had seen and heard, felt, smelled and tasted so much that they had no words for it. Many went home and never spoke of it again. Maybe that is why we recall their deaths today by keeping two minutes of silence. (We are going to do that now).
Optional: You may choose to end with two minutes silence, or you may invite people to leave a red or white silk petal on the scene.	After the war, poppies sprang up in the fields. It felt like a new beginning. Today people still wear poppies to help them remember the Great War and all other wars since, and to pray for an end to all wars.

A chance to meet... An Interview with Kathryn Lord



Kathryn is one of our most experienced trainers, and has been instrumental in the excellent uptake and nurture of Godly Play in the Sheffield area. Her reputation for being passionate for all things Godly Play has also led to invitations to Belgium, France, Ireland and Canada.

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

During my career as a science teacher in a secondary school I was excited by the *idea* of student-centred learning, but the constraints of the education system and the limits of my experience meant that my *approach* was quite teacher-centric. Filling empty vessels was also my default when leading the school's Christian Union, our Sunday school and an inner-city youth club. Godly Play turned everything upside down and gave me the tools to do things differently. It has been a life changer - for both my work and my own spiritual journey.

But it was a journey of discovery: I remember during my three-day training feeling my toes curling as Rebecca asked us to wonder what the felt pieces of the Good Samaritan story could be - annoyed that it was obvious what the story was going to be and what the answers therefore were!

What really matters to you about being a trainer?

Knowing that training people can change their lives and the lives of the people they are in contact with. I am energised to be a part of the Godly Play movement which transforms people, communities and institutions.

Tell us about some of the things your trainer role has involved

In 2012 I helped set up Mutual Blessings, a local expression of Godly Play UK to offer spiritually-enriching practices using the method and principles of Godly Play to people of all ages or needs, but especially those who may be on the edge of the Church's ministry. Six years later, enabled by grants from local and national funders, Godly Play is being used in many places around Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster and in a whole variety of ways including with children in more than 20 well-equipped Godly Play rooms, in care settings for older people, in schools, in fresh expressions of church and in re-envisioning Sunday morning services with all generations.

It's said that 'you never stop learning', so what's something that you've recently learnt?

It has been a steep learning curve working with people living with dementia during a three-year project to adapt Godly Play for older people in care settings (which we call 'Stories for the Soul'). I value the immense experience and skills of our development worker, Carrie Twist, as well as collaborating with others in the UK and beyond. Non-verbal language is even more important when working with people with dementia (as it is with very young children).

What area of specialism do you bring to Godly Play UK?

I am passionate about adaptations of Godly Play for different contexts including schools, inter-generational worship, and with older people in care settings. Along with trainer Kate Cornwell and trustee Jeremy Clines, I also offer training in Deep Talk, an adaptation - created by the Finnish trainer, Tuula Valkonnen. This is a powerful tool inspired by - but different from - Godly Play to enable groups to work out vision, values, purpose and meaning. It is used in secular work places, retreats, in mental health chaplaincy, in schools, and in spiritual accompaniment.



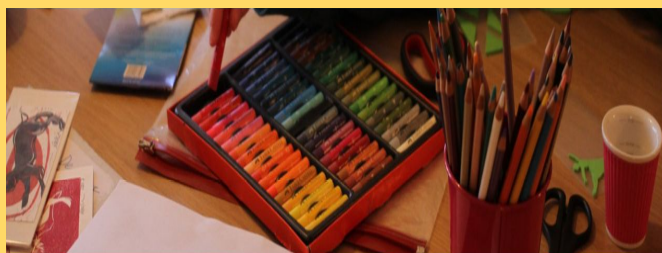
I think that Godly Play has much to offer the current movements that are rethinking what church - and indeed our Christian faith - could really be. Giving us playful orthodoxy and an empowering method, Jerome Berryman was way ahead of his time and we can be part of the creative process to discover and develop the future gifts - such as Deep Talk and Stories for the Soul - that grow from the gift of Godly Play. Some of those gifts will be branches of the original mustard tree and others will grow from saplings and will take on a life of their own. Presently I am tending the original tree, nurturing a few saplings and watching where new seedlings might shoot up.

Can you tell us a story about where you've seen Godly Play's impact?

My favourite story, because it is also my story, is the impact of Godly Play on the mission, ministry, worship and lives of the people of The Vine Church in Sheffield over the past 12 years. This is where Godly Play has lead us.

Ella is eleven and has been attending Godly Play for the last six years. During intergenerational worship, (which is also now based on Godly Play principles), following the reading of the near sacrifice of Isaac, Ella stands up to say that she finds it difficult to understand why God would do this because 'it's like teasing a puppy.' Adults also stand up to share their views of the story. Everything is held by the pioneer curate in a state of love and acceptance.

Ella also takes the lead in the first meeting of a few families wanting to exploring new ways of being church. She asks us to consider 'I wonder what helps us to come close to God' and provides clay, pens and snacks to help us in the creative process.



This makes me hopeful that, as Ella and all the other young people grow older, our church will be a space for all of us to play, to wonder, to ask the difficult questions, to participate, to lead and, like Jesus and Godly Play, to turn things upside down!

Bitesize news

When you have to share your Godly Play space...



Just sometimes having to use a shared space for Godly Play can have an exciting up-side! Eona Bell, at St Benet's Church, Cambridge discovered that her shared Godly Play space will soon be featuring in the ITV series 'Grantchester'.

In addition to some scenes involving smoke and firecrackers, their space will also be used for press interviews with the shows stars. They have been given advance apologies 'if any of your items have been moved and not put back in the same place'!

I wonder which star you'd like best to find in your Godly Play space?!



All set for the 2019 Godly Play Conference...

We very much hope to see you at the next Godly Play UK Childhood Spirituality Conference, on Saturday May 11th. Once again the venue will be the centrally-located Cathedral in Sheffield. The keynote speaker will be the leading expert on play,



Professor Elizabeth Wood, who is head of the School of Education at Sheffield University. Her research interests include play in early childhood and across the lifespan. The day before (Friday May 10th), a choice of day-long enrichment workshops will be on offer, so it's possible to make this into a Godly Play mini-break!

Save the date now and remember, Associates can book at a reduced rate!

Events and Training opportunities 2018-2019

Come along or pass it on...

Click the links below or see our website for further details.

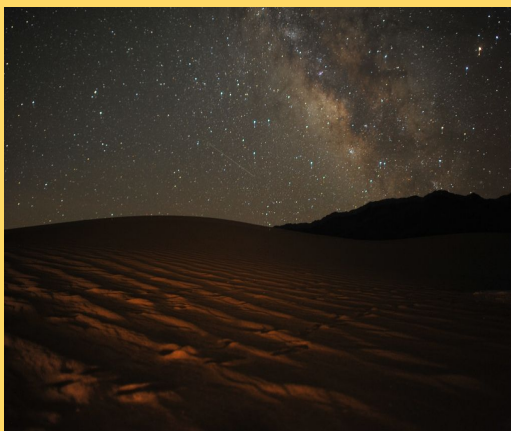
www.godlyplay.uk Enquiries to Sheila.rogers@talktalk.net

- [Sheffield: Training in Godly Play with older adults](#) 7th September 2018
- [Didsbury, Manchester: 3-Day Accredited Course](#) 26- 28th September 2018
- [Ampleforth, \(N. Yorks.\): 3 Day Accredited Course](#) 16-18th October 2018
- [Sheffield: Introduction to Godly Play](#) 20th October 2018
- [Derbyshire, Cliff College: 3 Day Accredited Course](#) 13-15th November 2018
- [Harrow, N. London : 3 Day Accredited Course](#) 8th, 22nd & 29th November 2018
- [Godly Play Scotland Conference:](#) 9-10th November 2018, Inverness
- [Sheffield: Advent Retreat using Godly Play and Deep Talk](#) 30th Nov-1st December
- [Edinburgh: 3 Day Accredited Course:](#) 3rd-5th April 2019.
- [Godly Play UK Childhood Spirituality Conference](#) 11th May 2019, Sheffield
- [Cambridge: 3 Day Accredited Course](#) 3 Saturdays: May 18, June 1 & June 8th 2019
- [Rugby: 3 Day Accredited Course](#) 11th-13th September 2019

Thank you for supporting Godly Play UK.

We hope this issue has stimulated your concern for childhood spirituality.

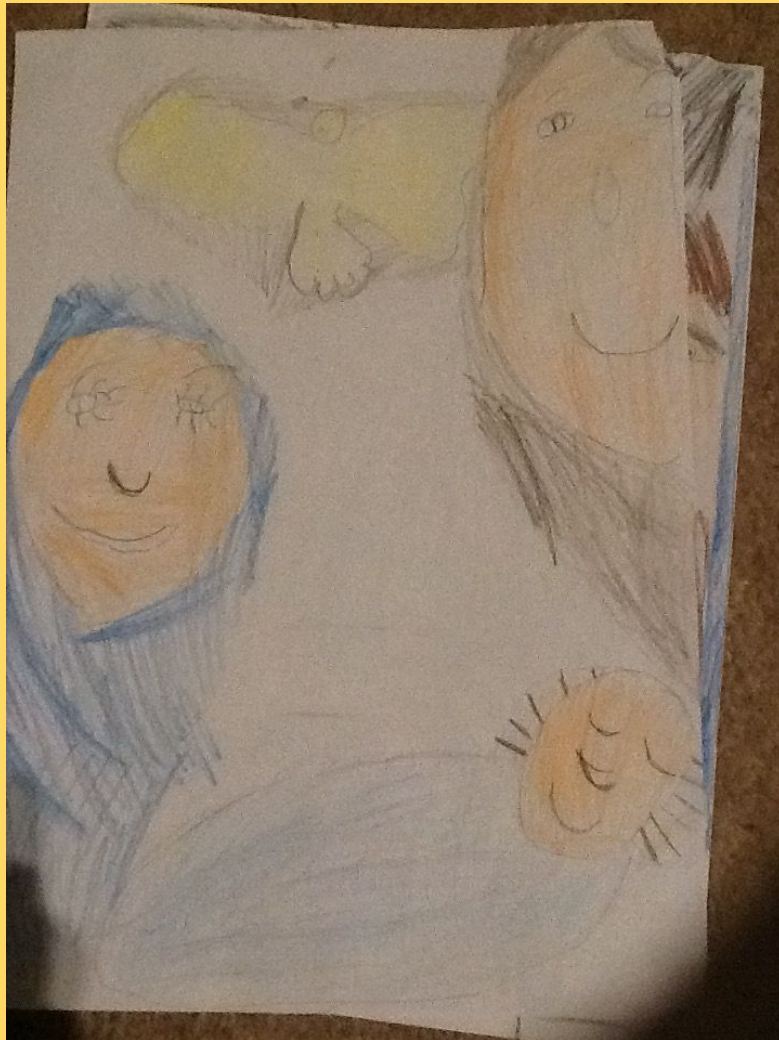
Do get in touch with suggestions for future issues.



*May the Good Shepherd,
who knows all of the sheep by name,
lead you to the good green grass
and stay with you in time of danger.*

*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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