

taking childhood spirituality seriously

# Godly Play<sup>UK</sup>

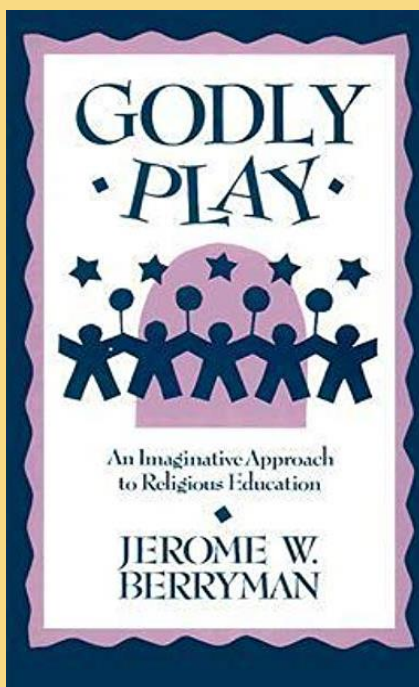
Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine : No. 5 Autumn 2019

Editor: Rebecca Nye

## At the threshold

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I wonder who first opened the door and invited you into Godly Play?

In my case, the door was in fact a book. Its author was like the doorman, guiding me into something that was both so different and in which I felt deeply at home.

Reading Jerome Berryman's first book, *Godly Play: an imaginative approach to religious education*, was my entry into all of this.

Since then, in my own ways, I've tried to be like a doorman to many people. But none of this could have happened without Jerome. He has given so much encouragement over the years to the dissemination of Godly Play in the UK. And now

it is our great pleasure to announce that Jerome has accepted our invitation to be the Patron of the Associates of Godly Play UK. Never has the title 'Patron' felt so apt, with connotations of father, supporter, protector, and saint. We are deeply honoured!

*The Rev'd Dr Jerome Berryman, Patron of the Associates of Godly Play UK*



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## Building the circle: Community News

What is it like to do a Godly Play lesson well?

*By Jerome Berryman*

I sometimes think that doing a Godly Play lesson is like playing Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, 'The Emperor'. Not that I could do that, but I have enough piano to guess what that might be like...

The composer is like the Creator of, say, the Parable of the Mustard Seed. The storyteller is like the artist playing the piano, like Rubinstein, or, in the Godly Play world, you. The orchestra is the circle of children enriching the music of the lesson with overtones and multiple instruments of their own. The piano played is the lesson told and shown in a room that is beautiful and richly appointed. When such a space is present in the telling of the story, the instrument is like a concert grand piano. If not, God is there but diminished, like playing 'The Emperor' on a plastic, toy piano with one octave. The magnificence is there, but hidden by our understandable impoverishment.

The words of the presentation are like the notes of the concerto. They sometimes swirl like mist. Sometimes they fall like spring rain. Sometimes they whisper like snow... Sometimes they are like the crash and flash of a great storm. The darkness of night... The player, of course, has the skill and mechanics, but there is always more in a successful presentation. There is the ample interplay of God, the self, the circle of children, and the room: all present and sounding as one.



# A Report on the National Conference: Free to Play

*By Alison Summerskill*



Free response time can be a challenge in Godly Play. It can be challenging for adult leaders, wondering how much guidance to give, and, as children pass through an education system, where doing their own work often comes loaded with a set of adult expectations, being 'allowed' free response time in Godly Play can leave them baffled and not knowing where to start.

To help us unpick some of the issues around freedom and play, the Childhood Spirituality Conference keynote speaker this year was Elizabeth Wood, Professor of Early Years Education at the University of Sheffield. As an expert in the field, Elizabeth was asked to offer us some challenge through her research into the play of young children. Although the research she shared had been with four and five-year-olds, its application is potentially wider than that. Her contention is that we never stop playing, and the things we played as four-year-olds will connect with what and how we play as adults. Her second observation is that children will subvert the rules adults impose on them – so we should perhaps not be surprised when we find children do not conform to our expectations.

Professor Wood challenged us to examine critically our assumptions about free play in our settings. Adults can stop children playing by leading children's play to suit adult agendas. These may be to educate or to indoctrinate. It led me to wonder about the times in Godly Play when children's play seems far removed from Christian themes. Even if my intention is not to indoctrinate, do I feel more comfortable with artwork or play that reflects the day's story (or any biblical theme!), rather than with guns or princesses? Yet what does life in all its fullness<sup>1</sup> mean for a child? Might it involve playing with themes of power and control, roles and relationships, alone or with other children, exploring possibilities from a place of safety? I liked the quote about play we were given from Thomas Henricks (2009, p.12)<sup>2</sup>: 'People are able to imagine things they never were and never will be ... play should be understood as one of the special places for the conjuring of



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<sup>1</sup> John 10.10

<sup>2</sup> Henricks, T. (2009) 'Play and the Rhetorics of Time: Progress, Regression and the Meanings of the Present' in *From Children to Red Hatters: Diverse Images and Issues of Play*, University Press of America

possibility.’ It reminded me of the wild imaginative play with parables in Godly Play. What are the fruits of ‘allowing’ free play? Children learn problem-solving, leadership, skills of negotiation. Through playing with other children, they expand their knowledge and experience of the world. Such play is real and worthwhile for children.

Perhaps because we so easily turn it into something else, children guard their play from adults, and something as small as a glance from an adult can stop play. However not interfering in children’s play is not the same as absenting oneself entirely from attending to their play. During play, children can victimise other children, or expose them to age-inappropriate material as they try to make sense of situations they may have witnessed or had happen to them. As practitioners we have a duty to safeguard all children in our care, and adult intervention in those scenarios is entirely appropriate.

Elizabeth Wood’s lecture also covered the taboos of magic and death. She shared Michelle Hill’s fascinating research into children’s play with the themes of death and dying<sup>3</sup>. Children distinguished between death as a permanent state and one from which they could return. In Godly Play we often comment on how children bury people of God in the desert. Introducing the concepts of ‘working theories’ and ‘funds of knowledge’ – the means whereby children make sense of their worlds – she asked us to notice not just which materials children worked with in the Godly Play space, but also how they worked with them, and what they reveal of the children’s understanding and their methods of enquiry. Sitting beside some children recently during desert play, I realised they were not burying random people, but figures representing authority and power were being firmly put in their place.

The field of play research is a vast one. You cannot get the whole of it into a two-hour lecture and Professor Wood gave us just a little piece of it, but one that gave us much to think about and that repays hearing again on the Godly Play website.

‘When adults and children encounter the limits to life, there are three kinds of responses: magic, denial, and play. Magic is the attempt to control what is beyond our control and manipulate life’s limits by will and belief. .. Religion can easily be turned into magic.

The second kind of response to the limits of human life is denial. We try to control our limits by reason, as if our minds were in complete control of life and death. We pile up layer upon layer of language to give an impression of control... Religion can become a defensive language game of unrelenting seriousness...

Become like a child, [Jesus] said, if you want to mature as an adult. To play the ultimate game, don’t rely on will, belief, denial, or reason alone. Play. Play in a Godly way. Play with the Creator. Enter the existential game with imagination, wonder, and laughter if you want to become new without end.’

Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play. An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991) pp. 16-17

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, M. and Wood, E. (2019) ‘Dead Forever’: an ethnographic study of young children’s interests, funds of knowledge and working theories in free play. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, In Press



# And it began to grow

## Associates of Godly Play UK

*By Diana Williams*

I remember, vividly, sitting in my first Godly Play trainers' and trustees' meeting as the inevitable admin jobs were being divvied out. Nervously, I looked down the list to see what I could do. As a new 'green' trainer many tasks were clearly beyond my capabilities, so offering to take a fresh look at the somewhat languishing 'Friends of Godly Play' scheme seemed the least



daunting. How hard could it be? With only about six names on the list, it seemed like the only way was up. Now, just over two years since the official launch of the re-imagined Associates of Godly Play UK at the 2017 Conference, it seems like a good time to reflect on progress, the scheme itself and what the future may hold.

From that lowly start, the scheme now has over 120 members and numbers are continuing to grow, mostly as a result of three-day courses. As well as our individual members, we now have some international, joint and institutional members too. This overseas interest has given us real food for thought about how we may be able to support and engage with our international partners. In fact, without one of our recent international members, none of us would be reading this at all. We are truly delighted that Jerome Berryman has joined us as an honorary Associate and Patron and feel really encouraged by his blessing for and support of this work.

Of course, raising funds to develop Godly Play is one of the main reasons for creating the scheme. Our gratitude at members' generosity is probably best demonstrated by our being responsible stewards and we are learning best how to do this we go along. The income generated to date has been directed in two main ways. Our main activity so far has been to provide very low cost introductory days, led by one of our trainers, in areas of relative deprivation around the UK. These have happened so far in Swansea, Hastings and Barking with a day in Bradford being planned. To build further on these links, materials-making days

are happening as follow up events to further nurture and support the growth of Godly Play in these areas.



Secondly, we have launched this magazine! With the wealth of experience we now share, this has developed into a key publication among the Godly Play community and largely accounts for the growing interest in membership from folk beyond the UK. As set-up costs have been substantial and circulation relatively small, we are now exploring ways to address this and make the community wisdom evidenced in the magazine available on a much wider scale. An additional blessing has been an enriched partnership

with the resources workshop at Bowthorpe, who generously continue to offer an annual discount for Associate members.

So what does the future hold? As the vision develops, we are continuing to search for new and creative ways to bring Godly Play to a wider audience. As well as



**THE GREATEST PARABLE**

developing links from the introductory days and looking for new areas to partner with, we are also aiming to provide training for those early in ministry. These plans are in their early stages but we hope that Associates' funds would be used to offer introductory courses in theological colleges and then subsidise three-day courses for those wanting to train further. We hope this will provide high quality input about children's spirituality in colleges where currently there is often next to nothing, and we hope this will raise awareness of Godly Play so that storytellers will encounter better levels of support from church leaders in future.

Much has changed since that meeting four years ago – we have more ideas, more to learn and many important questions to consider. However, what is unchanged is our unshakable belief that the nurture of childhood spirituality for all ages is worth every single penny. Perhaps there are others you know who may agree with this and would be willing to help this work grow.



**TRAINEES AT ST MICHAEL'S WONDERING ABOUT THE STORY OF RUTH. PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PAUL, KIERAN, MANDY, BILL, MARJ, JOE AND MICHAEL**

# Advocates' Activities

*By Mary Cooper Trainer coordinating the work of Godly Play UK Advocates*

## **Advocates are very valuable volunteers, supporting the work and spread of Godly Play in the UK.**

I was very pleased to be able to offer the gift of a fully-funded Advocate Enrichment Day immediately preceding the Godly Play UK Conference in May. This was made possible through the support of Godly Play Trustees. All present found it a positive and valuable experience. We shared a full Godly Play session together during the morning, immersing ourselves in wondering and response. We then spent the afternoon networking and sharing problems and practice within the very varied experiences of the Advocates participating. We look forward to other opportunities to gather our valued team of advocates together. Meanwhile, the following examples of the varied work they do provides a chance to thank some of them by name.

### **‘I wonder what a Godly Play Advocate does?’**

**This is an enormously varied role, and the examples below offer some answers to this question.**

*Gets back from a holiday, puts on the washing and immediately gets on with a reminder mailing for the forthcoming local Godly Play network meeting.*



*Thanks to Helen Robertson in North East England.*

For many Advocates the main focus is sustaining a local network of practitioners and organising meetings where Godly Play practice can be shared and supported.

*Thanks to all who undertake this work.*

One of our longest-established Advocates, and one of our newest, have set out on this journey with a new Godly Play Network meeting in Otley, West Yorkshire.

*Thank you Denise Brogden from Leeds and Mandy Thorlbury from Bradford.*

Another Network has just started in Oxfordshire.

*Thank you Carol Carter.*

Networks fulfil many roles: providing a place where regular practitioners can share a story session, anecdotes, good practice, materials, making materials; where a newcomer can experience Godly Play when there is no imminent Introductory Day. The frequency of network meetings varies from monthly to termly: some are attended by a Godly Play Trainer and some are not.

### **Advocates offer Godly Play Taster Sessions.**

Advocates play a key role in providing Godly Play 'Tasters'. Whilst they don't offer training, they are often responsible for people's crucial first encounter with Godly Play. Some do it as part of their day job.

*Thank you Elaine Jenkyns from Wales and Ronni Lamont from Canterbury, (who incidentally wins the prize for the most taster event summary reports submitted)*



Some offer taster sessions as part of their school work.

*Thank you Jeanny Wang from London, Alison Day from Sussex, Judy Dickin from Lincoln, Rosalyn Boyes from Saltburn-by-the-Sea and many others.*

Some offer taster sessions as part of their denominational role.

*Thanks to Richard Prescott, Helen Gill and Yvonne West working within the Salvation Army, and Bridget Steenkamp and Laura Guida working within The Assemblies of God.*



Such taster events help to arouse interest and encourage attendance at both Introductory Events and Core Training, led by Godly Play UK Trainers. Some Advocates work alongside Trainers at Introductory Days.

*Thanks to Eona Bell from Cambridge who travelled to St Albans to lead an Introduction with her local trainer.*

**Some Advocates support Godly Play a long way away from a Trainer.**

We have large areas of the country where there is no geographically local Trainer. Our Advocates in these parts of the country are invaluable, though sometimes feel isolated. It is important that Trainer and Advocate keep in touch by whatever means works for them.

*Gill Osborne from Norfolk and Hazel Scott Bowes from Cumbria are two Advocates working in rural areas who were able to offer each other some ongoing mutual support through making contact at the Advocate Enrichment Day.*



ISLE OF MAN

We now have three Advocates on the Isle of Man, who are working together supporting practitioners and who, through Taster Events and Network meetings, have recruited participants for a Three-Day Core Training to be held there September 2019.

*Thanks to Annie Naylor, Sue Yardy and Wendy Heaton.*

**Some Advocates are called 'Champions'.**

We now have some Advocates who have been trained to work particularly in advocating and supporting and spreading the work of Stories for the Soul, an adaptation of Godly Play for use with elderly people and in care homes.

*Thanks to Mary Tweedie, Isabel Wodrow, Bridget Steenkamp, and Su Parker Hallcroft.*

**Advocates UK are not a closed group. More would be welcome.**

If you think you could offer voluntary assistance as an Advocate, promoting Godly Play in one or all of these ways in any part of the UK, please contact Mary Cooper, Trainer coordinating the work of Godly Play UK Advocates.

**Huge thanks to all our Advocates everywhere  
for their vast and varied work in support of Godly Play UK.**

For further information go to <https://www.godlyplay.uk/practitioners/advocates/>



# Come from Away

## By Andrea Harrison

In Newfoundland, 'Come from Away' is a phrase that describes any visitor to the province. There were more than 160 of us who were come from away to the North America Godly Play Conference (20-22 June 2019) in St John's, Newfoundland.

With an invitation to play, we came from the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, South Africa, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Scotland and the UK.

The area is famous for its hospitality, notably finding space for 7,000 people whose flights were diverted when American airspace was shut down on September 11 2001. We, too, were greeted with outstanding hospitality by the local Canadian Godly Play team and the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador.



The Rev'd Peter Privett led our opening worship in St Thomas' Anglican Church, helping us all to get ready by recognising with Dr Seuss, 'We are all a little weird and life's a little weird and when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours we join up with them and fall into our mutual weirdness and call it love.'

Thereafter, we enjoyed 48 hours of gatherings,

workshops, storytelling, eating, drinking, dancing, shopping and plenaries.

The Rev'd Andrew Sheldon began the first plenary by considering how we might be ready to do Godly Play theologically, spiritually, emotionally and in terms of pedagogy. He used Ann Lewin's poem to anchor the talk.

Pause at the threshold  
Of the sacred space;  
Bow low,  
Prepare for fresh  
Encounter  
With the Holy One.

Ann Lewin

The second plenary was delivered by Dr Elaine Champagne, an associate professor in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Laval. She holds the Chair in Educational Leadership in Spiritual Theology and Spiritualities. We discovered that her research findings fully supported Godly Play practice: the child not existing for the adult; spirituality never outside the system of beliefs and values.

It was Dr Rebecca Nye's plenary on the last day that had the biggest impact. Recorded from home, Rebecca gave a series of short talks ending in some questions for us to consider. Beginning with her own story, she asked how Godly Play had become part of our story. She went on to reflect on how we might reflect on our primary task/calling, and on her feelings that the task of promoting and supporting Godly Play has become separated from her calling of 'transforming thinking and practice about childhood spirituality.' Looking ahead she reminded the audience that Godly Play had been ahead of its time twenty years ago. Was it any longer? What would we need to do to ensure that it stays abreast of new research, ideas and thinking? Perhaps there wasn't enough time to talk about this: it seemed to be big work, and consideration continued on into the following International Conference.



**GODLY PLAY LARGE**

There was a wide variety of workshops and as British Trainers Alex Mackenzie, Peter Privett and I were running some, it was impossible to attend them all. Alex was left with more questions than answers from 'The Greatest Parable and Godly Play Large'. Peter and I enjoyed the

'Etymology of Sacred Space', although I have been pleased to receive follow up notes, for at the time it was quite a dense lecture.

Being on a panel with Melinda Wenner Bradley, Rabbi Dr Michael Shire and Martin Steinhauser, as we shared our stories of faithful adaptations of Godly Play in Quaker, Jewish, Lutheran and Salvation Army traditions, was fascinating. A workshop on response time was really useful, though I found, in general, that the North American approach tended to be rather more directive than is generally the case of this side of the Atlantic.

On the Friday evening we enjoyed a lovely meal together and were formally welcomed by the Rt Rev'd Geoff Peddle, Bishop of the Diocese. He told us that having seen Godly Play when he went to Wales to study for his PhD, he returned home and asked his bishop for \$10,000 to get going with Godly Play. He got it! Might that be a plan for us?! The meal was followed by an excellent live band, and for a donation to Godly Play UK, I can share footage of Peter Privett dancing!

Attending a North American Godly Play Conference was a first for me. It felt as if I had crossed another threshold and experienced fresh encounters that will enrich and inform my thinking and practice of Godly Play.

## Feature Article

### 'Big work' – children's play in many cultures

*By Eona Bell*

*Over the years I have hugely enjoyed the ways Godly Play attracts the attention of diverse and talented people.*

*Having different perspectives allows us to look much further into the quality and significance of Godly Play's contribution to our understanding and practice.*

*In this issue's feature article, by Dr Eona Bell, we can see some of the professional diversity amongst Godly Play's network of support. Eona is an Affiliated Lecturer in Social Anthropology in the University of Cambridge and also an Advocate for Godly Play UK, helping to run the Cambridge Network. Her article draws on her anthropological insights about children's play around the world.*



At this year's Godly Play UK conference in Sheffield, I was fascinated by Professor Elizabeth Wood's account of 'Dead Forever', a game played by children at an international school in Switzerland. In a classroom where children were given an unusual amount of freedom to organise their own play, their teacher, Michelle Hill, observed how, over several months, the group played imaginatively with the experience of death and dying, role-playing the part of a dead person, and experimenting with different reactions to this. Hill notes that it is 'unusual for a child-led play theme of this nature to be sustained over time with little adult intervention, and for the play theme to be allowed, rather than being seen as taboo or inappropriate for young children.'



In Godly Play we are familiar with the idea that play can be the medium through which children wrestle with existential issues: birth, life and death, rejection and belonging, safety and danger. We set out to create a space for this to happen within a Christian context, presenting the sacred stories and practices of our faith tradition as a language in which to articulate and explore these fundamental human concerns. We do not shy away from entering the 'dark places' in the process, as we understand that children, as much as adults, may need to engage with troubling questions in their own lives, and the world they are growing up in.

Godly Play is often described as 'counter-cultural' in taking children's spirituality seriously, in challenging the hierarchies which often exist between age groups, and in allowing time and silence for children to respond creatively. It certainly seems true that our contemporary 'Western' culture prioritises other ways of bringing up children, which are far more focused on outcomes and achievement. As developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik puts it, over the past thirty years parenting in the US and Europe has become a competitive activity which has 'transformed childcare into obsessive, controlling, and goal-oriented labour intended to create a particular kind of child.' This model of 'intensive parenting' is very familiar to me from conversations with British parents, in church and elsewhere: some worry about getting their children into



the right schools, while others have fixed ideas about the gender roles they want their children to conform to, or the types of jobs they will do. Even some church leaders seem to hold preconceived notions about 'successful' Christian nurture, based on predetermined models of discipleship against which children can be measured for progress.

I'm a social anthropologist by training, and found myself wondering what, if anything, other cultures and societies might tell us about children's capacity to explore the big questions of life through play. Anthropologist David Lancy points out that it is actually quite rare to find examples of cultures where adults take time to sit with children and entertain or instruct them – in many parts of the world, adults are simply too busy with daily chores, and children must learn by observation. This is true as much for 'religious' activities as for everyday tasks. While many of the world's religions have a tradition of running schools for children, it seems far less common for children to be separated from adults during worship, as they are in many Christian churches in the West. Godly Play sometimes seems like a half-way house, taking children's spirituality and playfulness seriously, yet adult-led and separating children from the wider worshipping community!

So what is the evidence that given the freedom to do so – given, perhaps the 'right sort of adults', i.e. who don't organise them excessively or treat them as material to be manipulated – children will turn intuitively to free play to do the work they need to do of growing and learning and wondering about the universe and their place in it? How might children incorporate and re-interpret the language and practices of their community's religious or wisdom traditions in their imaginative games? And what can we, as Godly Play practitioners, learn from the free play of children around the world?

### ***Meaning in Mud***

The afternoon sun warms the muddy banks of the Kuskokwim River as five young Yup'ik Eskimo girls sit quietly talking and working their dull, flat knives into the mud in front of them. They are carefully preparing smooth mud palettes to be used for telling stories. This spot on the riverbank has been a favorite storyknifing place of the girls for years. It is well away from the foot and bicycle traffic of the boardwalks



that connect the houses to the church, school, post-office, grocery store, and other frequently visited buildings in the center of the village. After their palettes are ready, the girls begin their storytelling. Each storyteller illustrates her tale by drawing symbols in the mud, which are erased and replaced with new symbols as the story unfolds. When one storyteller finishes, another begins, until they tire of the play or it is time to go home for dinner' (DeMarrais et al 1994, p.179).

Storyknifing is a traditional pastime from Alaska which resonates in striking ways with Godly Play: it involves three phases: 'getting ready', when the children gather and go to a special place for storyknifing; the storytelling itself, when one child at a time tells their story and the others listen attentively; and the 'wrapping up' when there is a lull in the

talk, and one child signals the end by writing *yes* in the mud, and they all get up to go home.

There were various genres of storyknifing: traditional folktales, biographical or autobiographical accounts from the girls' own lives, and 'introduced' stories from the media. Sometimes the children would play games with the storyknives, such as drawing a picture or word and asking the others to guess what it might be. The activity became a means for children to share the norms and values of their community, while dealing together and individually with important incidents in their own lives.

I wonder how we let everyone in the Godly Play circle share their own stories?

I wonder how easy we find it to listen to other people's stories?

### ***Praying with stones***

In villages of the Peruvian Andes, the children of herders have virtually no shop-bought toys. Instead, they are allowed to play with ordinary household objects, food items and a huge range of natural materials: earth, stones, sticks, grass, leaves, branches, flowers, water and mud, which they collect from the mountainsides and use to build and populate complex miniature homesteads. Sometimes they act out scenes from daily life, with a herder-stone leading a herd of llama-stones out to pasture. Other times they play at festivals, decorating a llama-stone with a flower, recalling the annual celebration of Macho Pagaray, when the live working animals are dressed in bright colours to honour their work.



At another Andean festival which blends Inca and Christian beliefs, thousands of adult pilgrims visit the site of three large glaciers, where they gather stones and rocks to construct models of houses and other items they would like to own: these are offered to the Virgin of Fátima. The use of stones by adults in prayer 'put[s] children's play within the context of Andean religion ideology and prepar[es] them in both practical and spiritual ways for adult life' (Bolin 2006, p.65).

I wonder how natural materials help us and our communities come close to God?  
I wonder how we can challenge the consumerism of our own culture by letting children play with materials they do not 'own' but which are 'always there for them'?

### ***Dangerous beings***

Masquerade is central to ritual in numerous African societies, where secret and sacred knowledge is traditionally held by adults who embody powerful supernatural beings in their masked



performances. Children frequently make their own masks in imitation of the adults and rehearse songs and dances of their own. In Cameroon, very young children fear the forest spirits represented by the adult dancers, but once old enough to play with masks themselves, they develop a more critical understanding of the nature of mythical worlds, and the relationship between these and their social reality. After first performing dances of the mythic dangers represented by the spirits, the children devise their own masquerades representing very real and modern issues, such as a new political party challenging the authoritarian government. Adults, meanwhile, dismiss the children's masquerade as 'only play' (Argenti 2001).

I wonder how often we mistake children's creative responses and pretend play as mere 'mimicry'?

### ***Hercules chased by snakes – and saved by his father***

In a Greek primary school, children dramatised the myth of Hercules, who is attacked by snakes and monsters, before Zeus, his father, comes to the rescue:

Boy 1: [discussing the plot of the story] Now I'll try to cross the sea and you are the monster that jumps out of the water and tries to eat me.

Boy 2: [running after Boy 1 and screaming] I will catch you and kill you.

Boy 1: No, you can't kill me, you just can't. My father will not let you.

Boy 3: [jumping on the floor from a high chair] Don't touch my son. Hercules is my son and nobody should dare touch him. I am ZEUS, THE GOD!' (Papadopoulou 2012, p.589)

(This reminded me of the time a group of younger boys in my Godly Play group chose to respond to the story of the Exodus by physically re-enacting the crossing of the Red Sea, running backwards and forwards the length of the church hall for several minutes . . .)

I wonder how we can allow for some children's need to respond and play using their whole bodies?

This handful of vignettes shows, delightfully, how children take up stories and materials from the world around them and make them their own, becoming resources for their free play and imaginative exploration of deep and moving questions.

The examples I have cited – with the exception of Argenti's research in Cameroon – do not tell us what children are doing when adults are worshipping and/or engaged in sacred rituals. In Cameroon, children are often barred from adult ceremonies, and access to sacred knowledge is strictly controlled (at least in theory, since somehow children do know about masks and the types of dances where they are worn) but in most cases, we must assume that children are present in worship (or in community storytelling) and able to observe what adults do. This gives them the material they need to shape their games.

It is striking that in all of these examples, children adopt forms of expression – storyknives, building with stones, masks and myths – which are also used for special purposes by adults in their communities. It is not that these materials are intrinsically powerful, but that children notice that adults use them in a different way from everyday objects or ways of speaking. Children learn that some occasions, some ways of being, some places and some objects are special and can help people speak about mysterious,



even dangerous things. Similarly, when in Godly Play we mark out space by inviting children to cross a threshold, we handle story materials with care and respect, and we listen carefully to one another, we are modelling patterns of behaviour which children can make their own and use when they need to come close to God.

The evidence from social anthropology is that children in many cultures do delve into very 'big work' in their free play, often in spaces apart from adults. In Africa, and probably many other parts of the world, adults fail to understand this and trivialise children's play as 'mimicry' or evidence of immaturity. Some anthropologists have done this too, interpreting childhood and child's play only as rehearsal or preparation for the serious business of adult life. If, however, we turn this round and observe how adults continue to bring aspects of play into their own encounters with the sacred, then perhaps it is easier to recognise the profound value of children's play.

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## Some Scenes from the Free to Play Conference



### Pictures from the Conference Workshops

*Clockwise from top left:* Rachel Bainton tells the Story of Holy Week; Andrea Harrison leads a whole Godly Play session; Learning how to become a more playful teacher; Experiencing the Playful Art offered by Jeanny Wang

# Taking your wondering further...

## Children and Young People's Reflections on Godly Play

### The part of Godly Play that Lucy likes best

*Lucy was nine years old when trainer Alison Summerskill invited her to write about her experience of Godly Play for this magazine. Thank you Lucy!*



I like the story of Moses, particularly the part about the burning bush. I like this part because of the fact Moses talks to God. The fact that Moses sees that the bush is on fire but not dissolving is a MIRACLE.

Also, I love how when God gave Moses a challenge, he helped and encouraged him and the encouragement made him determined to persuade the king finally into saying 'YES!'. I also like



the part where Moses does it with help from friends: I can relate to this! Friends are so precious because they help you when times are tough: just like Aaron (Moses' brother) went to help fight for Moses' people too.

'The Story of Moses' is found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 6*. Moses also appears with the People of God in the Stories of Exodus, The Ten Best Ways and the Ark and Tabernacle all in *Volume 2*.

### Growing up with Godly Play

*By Hannah Fytche*



*A characteristic of many approaches to children's Christian nurture is that sooner or later it feels childish. There's a danger that as children 'grow out' of the approach they associated with God and church as a child, they feel it's time to grow out of God altogether. Godly Play seems to offer something quite different. Instead of growing out of this, the Godly Play approach and underlying theory of spirituality is about nurturing something to grow up with and progressively grow into, as this reflection by Hannah Fytche attests.*

*Hannah grew up with Godly Play, including listening to her mother, Jennie, learning the stories at home. Now she is a graduate student in Theology at Cambridge University, and has published two books *God's Daughters* (2016), and *Rooted in God's Grace* (2018), both with BRF. In this lyrical reflection she muses on her experience of Godly Play as a child and teenager, and its continuing role in her life.*

The box, shining gold and silver, opens. The fabric unfolds and the Storyteller speaks. A wooden farmer strolls across a field of brown felt, scattering seeds. The Storyteller speaks



again, and plants begin to unfurl. My imagination takes flight as wooden birds flock to one section of plants and start to eat them up.

I am there, feeling earth beneath toes and hearing calls of birds as they devour hopeful seedlings. Will any plants survive?

Such was the evocative nature of Godly Play for me as a child. Stories unfolded with words and props, and they took on a life of their own as I was invited to question, imagine, and wonder.



As a young teenager, Godly Play stories invited me again to wonder. I photographed each stage of the unfolding stories and wrote my own accompanying script or reflection to go with each one, with the help of the Bible passages they came from. I entered again into the tactile world of felt and wooden figures, and found there an invitation to discover Jesus' parables anew, and to communicate them to others. The imagination sparked by the opening of a shiny box encouraged me to use and develop my own words and storytelling.

My love of stories has continued for me, and grown, as has my sense of mystery and wonder. Now as a graduate student, words from the Communion liturgy help me to pray and to pastor: 'Great is the mystery of faith. Christ has died: Christ has risen: Christ will come again.' It is this marvellous sense of mystery that opens people up to deep questions and faith, to stories and ultimately to Christ. That same sense of mystery and wonder was at the heart of those Godly Play stories from my childhood.

Great is the mystery of faith. The Storyteller speaks again, and thistles spring up around another section of plants, and choke them. The sun rises over another section, and they wither. The plants of the fourth section, however, unfurl and unfurl with the Storyteller's words. Their roots grow deep into the brown felt, and their deep green leaves stretch tall. The wooden farmer is dwarfed by their height: and this is the mystery of faith at the heart of the story.

With the sowing of seed onto good soil comes the growing of plants that are healthy and strong. With the telling of a story to questioning, wondering listeners comes the growth of faith.

The Storyteller folds up the felt and places the wooden figures and birds back into the box. Yet the parable remains, a seed now sown, ready to grow.





## A Decade of Creating Godly Play Space in Edinburgh

*By Alex Mackenzie*

*In this article, trainer Alex Mackenzie describes the evolution at Cramond Kirk of not just one, but two spaces for Godly Play. Cramond Kirk is in the north west of Edinburgh, on the shores of the River Forth. It is built on a Roman Fort. There has been a place of worship there for nearly 2000 years, not always Christian. The current church building is 350 years old with a suite of halls which were built in the 1960s and refurbished for the millennium. Perhaps it helps to keep this long view of time in mind as we manage our own hopes, plans and obstacles in the creation and curation of Godly Play spaces. I wonder what traces of Godly Play there might be in 350 or 2000 years from now?*

When Cramond Kirk started Godly Play, at the beginning of 2008, it seemed impossible that we would have any room. All the spaces were multi-purpose and in constant use. The big question then was whether we could have a cupboard for the Godly Play things. As we began to use Godly Play, we did what many churches do, fitting a session into the existing programme once a month. Our church had four groups Godly Playing, each in their own Sunday Club space. The smaller spaces were so much better than the large halls. At the end of the first year our oldest group decided that they had enough and choose to do Godly Play every week.

It was our church secretary who suggested a room in the basement of our manse (vicarage). It is a very short walk, across a graveyard, from the church, but in the opposite direction from our halls. The basement had just been refurbished and our secretary was keen to use the space for something other than jumble sale storage.



So, we had the luxury of a freshly painted, carpeted and empty room. It was small, but so was the group of children, and we didn't have much in the way of resources. The church provided some shelving, made by our handyman. After a very short 18 months of Godly Play we had a room, a wall of shelves and a few resources. And children who loved Godly Play. What had looked like a huge number of stories when they were in the boot of my car took up only a little shelf space. Looking at the room, our next task was to

build up the stories. As I learnt a story, I made or bought the materials to go with it. And sometimes it felt a bit like cheating, because for a while I only had one parable box and I kept swapping the story.

Our resources have come from a variety of places. Some are from the workshops, from Bowthorpe in the UK, from Germany, from Finland and from Latvia, but most are homemade. The resources we purchase are funded mostly by donations. Response materials are



bought from our Sunday Club budget. We had a bequest, which made life much easier and paid for some of the bigger things, like the Temple. We are beginning to replace some of the homemade, core stories with resources from Bowthorpe. Not because there is anything wrong with them, but we now have a second Godly Play space and made the decision to have as much consistency between the two as possible. This is a slow process.

Whenever I go away to a Godly Play event, my circle expect me to bring them back a Godly Play gift! Sometimes this is a new book or some new response material. From the recent Sheffield conference it was the Greatest Parable (Bowthorpe) and from the Newfoundland conference it is new Parable of the Good Shepherd pieces (Latvia). The children will also bring things to add to the room – mostly pictures or postcards that they find, that reflect one of the stories.

We have a full set of Volume 6 and Volume 7 materials and quite a few of the Volume 8 ones. Because of space, we have the Volume 6 things in the Godly Play room and the Volume 7 things are split between it and the flexible space.



It has taken a long time to build up the resources – more than 11 years – and we are still adding stories. The circle sometimes play the ‘What’s new?’ game. That happened a lot in the early years, but not so much now. Apart from the addition of materials, the biggest change for the room came after I visited the room in Sheffield (Kathryn Lord and Kate Cornwell’s room). Seeing the layout there I realised that the focal shelf had to move. We spent a long time looking for focal shelves that would work and settled on Ikea’s Besta range. Since then we have added another two sets of shelves, for parables and to store work. Now the room feels settled. And, strangely, bigger.

The most important thing about the room is that it is the children’s room. They own the space. When we got the room at first, I was asked, ‘Is this really our space?’ ‘Who else will use it?’ ‘Do we need to share it?’ ‘Will there be adults in here?’ As a

church, we have honoured the promise that this is the children’s room. We don’t have meetings in it, no one leaves random things in the room and no one else uses the resources. It does make it easier that it is in basement of the manse, so there is little passing traffic.

It is a working room, we use it nearly every Sunday. The children leave work and they do come back to it time and again. Sometimes work is on the shelves for a whole year, and I have noticed that some of it is shared work, with one child starting it and others picking it up and adding to it on different weeks.

The children have set the Godly Play room rules – no coats, no shoes, no toys, no phones. They stay outside the room. We were instructed to get coat and shoe racks. I was told that as they sit on the floor, they don’t want to be sitting on other people’s mud

and coats and toys take up too much space. If there is a downside to this room, it is that it is small.

The biggest change for our children came when we couldn't fit them all into the room. We needed another space, so we moved the older children – who are teenagers – around to see what would work for them, setting up temporary spaces using the set of travelling materials I have. One Sunday we happened to be back in the room. They ran their hands over the carpet, they wanted to touch the stories. One teenage girl stretched out on the floor and said, 'Ah, it's good to be back. We're home.'

That's when we realised that we needed to have a second permanent home and to have consistency of materials between it and the first room. That is a daunting task. It has meant looking at the two and deciding which homemade materials we can replicate and which we need to replace with things from Bowthorpe. Both approaches take time.



With the flexible space we thought that we knew what we were doing. We bought some Ikea shelves, but they weren't quite right (they are now used in the main room to store work). Finally, we bought the same Ikea cupboards we have in the main room. Castors were added to a couple of these and the rest stack on top. It makes them easy to move into place. They are stored in the corner of the room and in a walk-in cupboard. It takes us less than five minutes to set the room up – wheel out and put the core stories on top. We add tables for response materials.

And we have made mistakes with the materials, too. In an effort to save some space, and money, we bought small boxes for our parables, but they do not work – they are too small, too heavy, too ugly and they are just not the same as the ones in the Godly Play room. So, we've taken a deep breath, and started to buy boxes that match.

There are logistical downsides with having two spaces. For example, who uses which and when, and do we need two stories or do we have two sets of resources? We learnt from the reaction of the teenagers that we need to move the groups between the two spaces. Maybe that will change when the second space is fully resourced. The more we add to it and the more it links back to the GP room, the less this is a problem. We are also seeing that the children are more at ease in the second space. And it helps that these are different children to the ones who started off in the Godly Play room. Those first 'children' have moved on to university and to work.

For the storytellers at Cramond – and we have four – everything they need is in the room – all the stories are there, all the response materials are there. There is very little to set up – just open the door and go. For the flexible space, we are adding the core stories and set up takes less than five minutes – it's push and pull. Push the shelving into place and pull out the top shelf resources. And, add a few cushions.

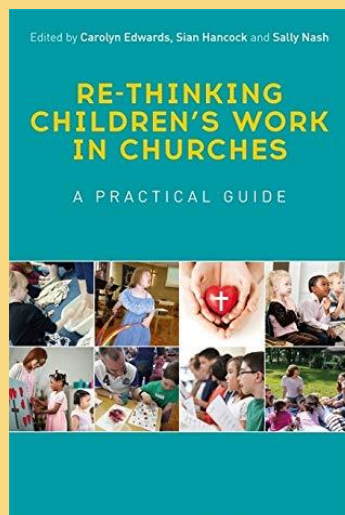
And now, we have a new Session Clerk – who is a storyteller – and a Pastoral Care Assistant whose work is with our elderly parish. Both would like Godly Play for the much older people who come to our church clubs, but both spaces involve some stairs. So, maybe a third Godly Play space would be a good idea. Help!



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

### *Reviews by Michelle Brown and Susie Steel*

*With this first book, for adults, it is difficult to know who to thank first! Thanks to our reviewer, Michelle Brown who is a trainer for Godly Play Scotland. But thanks also to Sian Hancock, trainer in Bristol, who edited and contributed a chapter to this very useful new book.*



*Re-Thinking Children's Work in Churches: A Practical Guide*, Edited by Carolyn Edwards, Sian Hancock and Sally Nash (2019), Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia.

ISBN 9781785921254 RRP £19.99

This is a strong collection of contributions from fourteen authors who look at the complete development of children and how our different approaches in church children's work support that full development. The book is particularly written for people who work directly with children or those who are passionate about seeing effective children's ministry happening in churches and Christian organisations. The authors bring a wealth of experience, study and love for this ministry.

Each chapter explores a different metaphor for a way of approaching children's work. The chapters close with questions for further reflection as well as references for further reading. Both help if you are reading this book for personal study, or if you are reading and discussing it with a group from your own church to explore further your church's style of children's ministry. Since each chapter is self-contained, this also makes for an easy read if you need to fit in reading and thinking through this book in the middle of busy days.

As a Godly Player, the chapters which resonate most for me are '*Teddy Bear: Holding the Whispers Shared in the Dark*' by Paul Nash, '*Clown and Fool: Fun and Play*' by Sian Hancock, and '*Falling Leaf Catcher: Experiencing Awe and Wonder with Children*' by David Csinos.

Paul Nash's chapter 'Teddy Bear' explores pastoral care and providing safe spaces. It reminds me of how safe a space at church we are able to provide through Godly Play and how much time we give for the children to work through their emotions through play, silence and wonder. I think this chapter could be helpful towards thinking reflectively about the pastoral care and spiritual accompaniment we provide in Godly Play.

Sian Hancock's chapter, 'Clown and Fool' explores play – what is it and what is its relevance to children's ministry. She challenges the reader to think through the meaning of clowning and jester in relation to work being done within church.

Sian writes, 'Clowning is not so much a character to assume but an approach to thinking that is open-minded, curious and playful. It is a laying down of self and conformity to create opportunities to explore – where everything is possible and nothing is quite as it seems (p.82)'.

I wonder if in our wondering we are open to being like a clown – open-minded, leaving behind ourselves to provide space to explore further the story. Sian clearly explores play

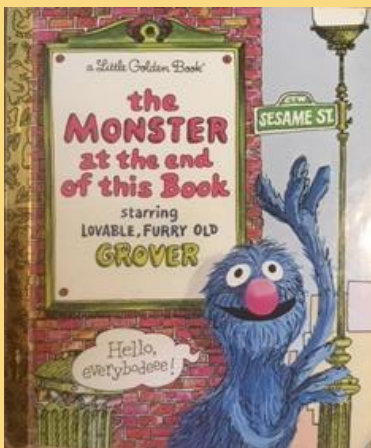
in her chapter and leaves you with more to ponder as you apply all of this to thinking through your own ministry.

The most standout contribution to the book is 'Falling Leaf Catcher' by David Csinos. His insights and reflections on childhood spirituality are engaging and echo the research and ideas of those who have inspired him. He notes and unpacks the work of David Hay and Rebecca Nye in their book, *The Spirit of the Child* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006). He also writes of an exercise Mark Yaconelli once led at a gathering to help people reconnect to the God people already know through God encounters in the little moments of their lives. Csinos's chapter explores the openness of children to encountering God and challenges us as church workers to pay attention and learn from the children and their understanding of God.

Csinos writes, 'When we do pause to catch a few of these leaves, we might find that they are the real stuff of faith, the reason that any of us continue to try living as disciples of Jesus. And we might realise that the journey of faith among children and adults is not as different as we are often led to believe. If we shift our focus from teaching children about God to helping them experience God and name those moments when they catch God's Spirit, we realise that we all walk a common pilgrimage (p. 177)'.

Csinos's chapter is the highlight of the collection but the whole book is worth reading and further reflection. This is an excellent resource for you and the team at your church.

*For our choice of a book for children, we are grateful to Susie Steel who is a trainer in Hull. She has particular experience of working with disadvantaged children.*



*The Monster at the end of this book* by Jon Stone  
Illustrated by Michael Smollin

Originally published 1971 by Golden Books, Random House.  
Copyright renewed by Sesame Workshop 1999

ISBN 978-0-307-01085-8 Available from Amazon £3.99

I have chosen to write about a book that I have found to be loved by many children that I work with. I am a supply teacher and Godly Play practitioner and trainer in Hull. I am also particularly interested in the developing spirituality of the child, and more recently in raising awareness of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

One school I worked at for six months was on one of the large housing estates in Hull. The class had many children coming from chaotic, difficult lives. They needed a lot of nurture and love, and it was a struggle to keep on top of the demanding curriculum at the same time as giving them the attention they craved. However, story-time was an especially treasured time; and this book became a firm favourite.

Apart from the moment of connection we had in the reading and sharing of the story, and the security of the familiar reads and re-reads, I think there was a wonderful, safe exploration of fear and taking control of a situation in the story. As you read the book, Grover, the main character, becomes more and more scared of the 'monster at the end of the book' and tries many different ways to stop you turning pages. Each time, the reader

looks to the waiting children, alternating between the roles of reader and Grover. Grover does not want you to turn the page ... so you look at the children with a wicked glint in your eye 'Shall I?' and the children shift from observers to protagonists 'YES! TURN IT!'. The reader turns the page and turns back into Grover. 'Oh no, you turned another page. You do not seem to understand what you are doing to me!' and the children roar with laughter. This to and fro – observer and protagonist – continues until the penultimate page, when Grover pleads with the children not to turn the page... (wicked glint) 'TURN IT!' And you can guess the ending.

Needless to say, the build-up of tension is released in floods of bonding giggles all around. They have chosen to drive us all towards the monster together, and yet we are safe. Michael Rosen, in a recent BBC interview, describes how literature can hold you in this way. 'It is exactly as Aristotle describes it – this is the feeling of being held or contained by the drama and the pain of what is going on but it didn't happen to you and the pain didn't go on. You are in some way relieved because you've been held by it.'

The children I was working with seemed much younger than their six years because of their experiences (or lack of them). Yet something different happened in the room when I read this story – a story which I imagine to have been written for younger children. Maybe it was the way I read it. Maybe they loved it because I loved it, and sharing the story was a way for us to connect with each other. The 'again, again' that you hear with toddlers was still very much part of the way these children behaved, and the more we read it, the more it became 'our story'; and that brought us closer still. The experience of reading about Grover's fear drew us close and drove out the fear with laughter and love. The book 'held us', and by reading it again and again, it became our story.

## The heroes and heroines of Godly Play materials

Godly Play materials that come from St Michael's Workshop in Bowthorpe, on the outskirts of Norwich, are all hand-crafted. Here are some of the people who make them.



**KIERAN LOVES SPENDING HIS AFTERNOONS SANDING ITEMS TO BE OILED THE NEXT DAY (USUALLY BY HIM!).**



**MARY DILIGENTLY PAINTING THE BORDERS ON OUR FACES OF EASTER PLAQUES. SHE IS QUITE THE EXPERT!**



**KEITH MAKES OUR JEREMIAH CUPS AND THE CHALICE (FOR THE CHALICE, PLATE AND TABLE SET). PICTURED WITH HIM IS JOE. JOE HAS A VERY STEADY HAND, WHICH MEANS HIS SKILLS ARE HIGHLY SOUGHT AFTER FOR OUR MORE DELICATE PIECES.**



# The Feast

## A chance to meet ... An interview with Sian Hancock



*Sian is a Godly Play trainer based in Bristol. She brings a wealth of experience in children's ministry and education to Godly Play UK, and has recently co-edited the book Rethinking Children's Work in Churches, which is reviewed in this issue. Read on to find out how she became involved with Godly Play, what she enjoys most about being a trainer and the most unexpected response-time discovery!*

### **How did you get into Godly Play in the first place?**

I remember sitting in a coffee shop reading Jerome Berryman's book, *Godly Play: an imaginative approach to religious education*. I was reading his description of the classroom, and as I was struggling to visualise what he meant, I got out a pencil and some paper to map out his description. When my daughter came to meet me, I gave her my sketched plan to check, as I read out the description again! It was such a revelation. I was curious and wanted to know more.

That was over 10 years ago. I had moved out of primary education (where I had co-ordinated RE) and started as a tutor for Bristol CYM at Bristol Baptist College, training youth, children and family workers. As I continued my search to find out more, I discovered a three-day training event happening in Cambridge and was encouraged to book myself on it. So it was with some ignorance and naivety I discovered Godly Play and going deeper, found it resonated with my ethos for learning, my understanding of children, the learning process, and God. I'm not saying that it was easy but it kept nudging me to think about what I was doing and why; my expectations for the Sunday groups I was leading; what and how I was talking in my teaching and my use of questions – having used philosophy for children in my Masters research this was a satisfying extension.



### **Why and when did you become a Godly Play trainer?**

After about four years, I recognised that working within a theological college gave me an opportunity to share Godly Play with those training for ministry as well as within my local Baptist church and primary school. I was keen to see the gap close between what children experience in school and what they encounter in church. After my initial jolt at being given the church year story to prepare and present during my training, I have gone on to appreciate and consider further the significance of key Christian traditions and symbolism that may not be so overt in Baptist church life.

### **What matters most to you in your work as a trainer?**

When you have discovered something of value, it's exciting to share your discovery with others – like the shepherd inviting friends and neighbours to share the celebrations of

finding the lost sheep. Often people come to training weighed down with the challenges and struggles they are experiencing in their setting and seeking a quick remedy. It is such a privilege to journey with folk, to share insights and to notice how, as people embrace the principles that underpin Godly Play, they question themselves more than they question the challenges. Sometimes we need to be the change we are seeking and often glimpses of that transformation are caught at the training.

Often the three-day core training is likened to a guided retreat, the days are as intense as they are inspiring, and by the end the group are in a significantly different place to the one where they started. The Training the Trainers course was even more so. There is a good body of literature to become familiar with. There is ongoing research upon which practice is reviewed and developed. There is a network of relationships – circles within circles – that cross the oceans, overcome language barriers, to bring a cross-cultural slant to Godly Play and a richly diverse community. I value the paradox of the robust foundations upon which Godly Play stands within the mystery of the wondering as it spirals.

**Can you tell us about something that's recently happened as part of your work as a trainer?**



A key piece of work I was involved in locally was to introduce the whole of my church to Godly Play. I was fortunate to be alongside a minister who grasped this vision, took childhood spirituality seriously and understood Godly Play. Together we and the church committed to following the two year curriculum. To begin this journey we had a two-pronged approach: whilst I was training up the children's work team and introducing Godly Play to the children, the minister

simultaneously did a series of teaching on being a child, what it means to be a child of God and children in the Bible. This groundwork helped the adults to recall their childhoods, to consider the characteristics of being child-like and to think about how God has often used children in God's mission to bring about God's purpose. The whole congregation then began to follow the stories together through worship and scripture (sometimes as a Godly Play story but not always) and then as adults with a sermon and children with Godly Play session. We offered Saturday morning sessions for families, so that parents could experience the flow of a session alongside their children. We included it within our monthly All Age Learning whereby everyone had the opportunity, after opening worship, to explore the same text around the building through messy, contemplative, arts activities and a 'sermonette'. This way adults were able to experience getting up and leaving the sanctuary to 'go out' too. I have subsequently done similar things with two other churches, one of which was on an estate where many adults were new to the biblical narrative; where being a non-literate community meant that visual objects of the story made a particular impact.

**What area of special interest do you bring to Godly Play UK?**

Being in higher education has enabled me to introduce Godly Play to those who are often the 'gatekeepers' in the local church setting. Sometimes this can be challenging as the academic environment focuses on the cerebral and the opportunity to play can seem misplaced. Seeking reason and meaning can spoil mystery and stifle wonder. But on the other hand, if and when the students 'get it', the potential to enrich the experience of

others is increased as Godly Play is taken into so many other communities and its values influence many ministries.

One of the ways I have described Godly Play is that it allows the biblical narrative to unfold and speak for itself. The centrality of the Word is key to Baptists. As I mentioned earlier, Godly Play has helped me to appreciate more Anglican traditions, and in turn this has helped me to consider the significance of the Baptist ecclesiology. In this way I have explored some of the presentations to reflect a Baptist understanding and expression. Of course, being Baptist this means there is no one way of doing things, so it has been important to leave some space for this too.

### **What's been your favourite Godly Play moment?**



**SIAN'S WORKSHOP AT THE FREE TO PLAY CONFERENCE WAS 'THE SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE OF CHILDREN'S PLAY'.**

I have loved seeing children as young as five engaging with the biblical text and in doing so discovering new insights. I recall two young boys in my Sunday group, wondering in response to the story of the great feast\*. One said that the king would be sad that no one came to his party, whilst the other argued that he would be glad to have the opportunity of inviting those who wouldn't normally be invited. As both spoke almost together there was a momentary pause as they heard what the other had said and began to consider it from that perspective – the silence was deafening! That interaction and exchange, the mutuality and reciprocity is what makes the circle so special and strengthens the group as they journey together.

(\*not an official GP story, but we'd shared this story in a Godly Play-style session.)

### **Finally, can you add to our collection of 'funniest Godly Play moments'?**

Our Bristol Network group had a making day in the Forest of Dean. We were given permission to help ourselves to any resources we needed, so two of us went upstairs to gather materials. When we opened the door to one room we were a bit taken aback to find the roof had fallen in and it looked like a bomb had gone off! Oh how we laughed when we learned we were the first to discover this, and that they weren't just very untidy Godly Players!

## **Bitesize news**

### *Exciting news from Wales*

Godly Play will soon be available through the medium of Welsh. Cass Meurig, a Welsh trainer, has been working for several years on translations of the scripts of The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volumes 2, 3 and 4. 'From my first three-day course, I've felt a call to make Godly Play available in Welsh,' says Cass. 'My own Godly Play practice is almost entirely through the medium of Welsh, and so I've been translating as I go along – although I had to revise all the scripts after the new volumes came out! I hope that publishing them will raise the profile of Godly Play in Wales, and enable it to spread to Welsh-medium schools and chapels.' Cass's translations are now in the process of publication by Cyhoeddiadau'r Gair, in co-operation with the Godly Play Foundation and with the help of a grant from the Church in Wales. Look out for them around September.



## *Support in Sussex*

After six years of gathering donations at network meetings, the Sussex Godly Play Network has been able to support two churches in Hastings with £50 each towards their start-up of Godly Play on Sundays. Now both of these churches are well on the way to establishing Godly Play teams, following additional support from the Associates Fund for training. Maybe other networks could try this too?



## *New door opens in Oxfordshire*



Advocate Carol Carter writes: 'Having moved to Oxfordshire last year, I was keen to find a Godly Play network group similar to the one I had been involved with in York, but found there wasn't one in this area. The answer was therefore to start one! The first meeting of the new Oxfordshire Godly Play network happened in June. More than a dozen practitioners and beginners came to the Godly Play space at Witney Methodist Church. We shared the story of The Great Family and then, after our feast, we wondered together about what we wanted our network group to offer in the future – story telling, making and training sessions were all suggested.

We will meet again in September, details yet to be decided. We are open to anyone in the Oxfordshire or surrounding area and Carol would be pleased to hear from anyone else who would like to join our group'. [paul.carol.carter@phonecoop.coop](mailto:paul.carol.carter@phonecoop.coop)

## *Nurturing Vulnerable Children in Northwood*



Advocate Jeanny Wang writes: 'I've been doing Godly Play regularly for the last five years for the children at Holy Trinity school, but in the coming autumn term I've been asked to pilot a kind of creative nurture group for vulnerable children in the school. These children are the ones who are often disengaged from their classroom learning. Generally they love and engage with Godly Play: in fact it may be one of the very few things that they do engage with at school. I don't know what exactly I'm

going to do yet: perhaps it will be some sort of extended response time with different materials that call out to them, perhaps something entirely different, but this has come out from how they respond to Godly Play'. If Godly Play has inspired aspects of a nurture programme you've provided, Jeanny would love to hear from you. [jeannyjyw@gmail.com](mailto:jeannyjyw@gmail.com)

## *And the people of the world can come...*

The 6th European Godly Play Conference will take place in Mechelen (Belgium), from September 18th - 21th 2020, preceded by an Academic Symposium on 17th September. All are welcome.

<https://www.kerknet.be/godly-play-vlaanderen/artikel/european-godly-play-conference-2020>

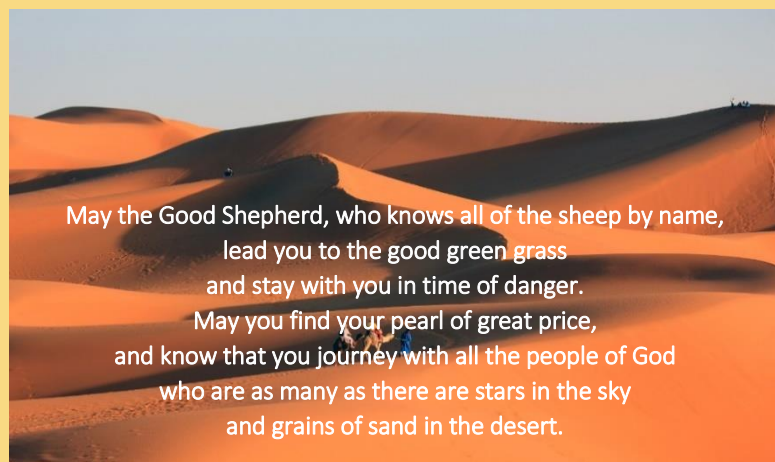


## Sending out

Three-day courses are being planned for next year in London, Gloucester, Wales and Rugby. Full details be on the website very soon.

**[www.godlyplay.uk](http://www.godlyplay.uk)**

*Do you know someone who would be interested in one of these? Are there ways in which you could make them known? We would love to hear your suggestions. Enquiries to [sheila.rogers@talktalk.net](mailto:sheila.rogers@talktalk.net)*



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.



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

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

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