

taking childhood spirituality seriously

Godly Play^{UK}

Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine : No. 8 Spring 2021

Compiled by Eona Bell, Gill Ambrose,
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At the threshold



I wonder what thoughts, feelings, and expectations you bring with you as you open this magazine, our first of 2021. Some people felt the turning of this new year brought little excitement or hope for new beginnings, less of a threshold than a continuing, gloomy path. There may be fear, too, about the future, especially for the children and young people we know, as they live with ongoing uncertainty and change. Others have observed that one of the sad developments of this time of pandemic has been the heightened sense of risk

attached to crossing boundaries. I think of how I tense up as I ready myself to enter a food shop, preparing to negotiate safe distancing from other people, trying not to touch anything I won't buy, all the while half-blinded by my foggy glasses! And, of course, we have had to accept that even those rooms and buildings where we used to gather as Godly Play circles, safe spaces to come together and come close to God, may now be places of danger. While we long to offer welcome and hospitality, we must show love for our neighbours by remaining apart.

Great distances separate the contributors to this issue, as we have invited Godly Play people from around the world to reflect on their experiences of Godly Play during Covid-19 – what did they discover when they stepped into this unfamiliar and restricted world? Had anything surprised them about Godly Play, or about children's spirituality? We have news, too, of future training, taster experiences and book groups for Godly Play UK – there is much to look forward to.

We hope that you will find a place where you feel comfortable to sit for a while within the circle of people from across the world, reading our magazine. Whether you are able to use Godly Play at this time, or whether you are not, you are welcome.

Eona Bell is an Advocate for Godly Play UK.

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Building the circle

Creating this issue

Everything is in flux, and Godly Play is no exception. Our circles, as we have known them, are mostly impossible. New ways are emerging, and the Godly Play Foundation in the USA has created a Facebook group simply called Knowing Godly Play in a New Way.

Meanwhile, Rebecca Nye, who had the vision for this magazine, developing and editing it, has now handed it over in order to concentrate on other work. We thank her for her vision and commitment, and for establishing a publication that can share good news about Godly Play as well as attending to much wider issues in childhood spirituality. A small group will now take the magazine forward.

So when we gathered (electronically, of course) to consider this March issue, we began to wonder what exactly, in this ever-shifting situation, it might be for! How could it reflect the new world in which we find ourselves and be a vehicle for all that has been learnt? We decided to go global and invited contributions from contacts across the world.

We decided that in creating the magazine, we have four aims at the moment:

- To encourage thinking about the development of childhood spirituality.
- To maintain our community and make it more visible.
- To celebrate and honour those involved in Godly Play in the UK.
- To support the development of each reader as a practitioner.

Once again, we would like to thank our generous Associates, whose contributions have helped to fund not only this magazine, but also the vital development work that has taken place over the last year to explore forms of Godly Play that defy the pandemic. We thank all those who have contributed so kindly to this issue, a good many of them writing in a language which is not their mother tongue. And we would really value feedback. Has this been interesting and helpful? What else might this magazine offer that would be of value to you, and those with whom you share Godly Play. Would you like to contribute? Have you got something to share with others? If you have, please get it touch (admin@godlyplay.uk). We would love to hear from you.

Gill Ambrose is Chair of the Trustees of Godly Play UK.

Play in a Plague Year – across the UK

Godly Play in tents

By Wendy Coleman

Wendy Coleman is the Children's Minister at St Andrew's Church, Rugby.

As we emerged from the first lockdown I decided to offer 'Worship in the Garden'. I realised the service would have to meet the needs of the whole family, families would have to stay together in one spot, and we would need an all-weather shelter. I

wondered how I could enable families to fully participate and learn together. Once I had discovered some affordable tarpaulin tents the plan started to come together.



Each family was provided with a tent, resource box, prayer bag, a small Godly Play story and an adapted script. At the start of the service, I invited the children to empty their resource box and turn it over to use as a focal point. We placed the relevant coloured felt on top of our boxes and then placed a candle, a bible and a cross on top, saying together 'God is with us'.

We worked with the desert stories and I was very excited when I realised that we were actually being the people of God outside. Mostly, the children led the way, some having experienced Godly Play before. To hear the stories being told around the circle in each tent was very moving and the children quickly renamed their service 'Tent Church'.

With restrictions eased and the weather colder we took this tent church indoors. What we had learnt outside came inside. This experience opened up new ways of enabling intergenerational worship and showed me how to encourage faith at home. I witnessed how deeply engaged a toddler was working one to one with their parent and realised that this could be a better way of working with parents and toddlers.

We all loved tent church so much that we will be offering this again in the future.

Holiday Club 2020 in Guernsey

By Eleanor White

With her husband, Eleanor White leads the children's work at St Pierre du Bois Church on the island of Guernsey.

As we started to move out of lockdown in late spring 2020, here in Guernsey, and I began to reflect on what my own children and the children of our local community most needed, I felt that



extended time to play freely with other children would be healing and restorative.

I therefore offered two weeks of a three-hour morning club in the summer holidays. After gathering, we collected for an opening circle, then a session of outdoor play with options of free play or some more structured games. We returned to church for a morning tea break followed by a Godly Play story and wondering time. There was the chance for more play, either in the church or outdoors. We had plenty of materials available for open-ended creative play and were fortunate to be situated close to some lovely outdoor spaces. On a couple of mornings, when the weather was less good, we were able to use the sports hall at the neighbouring community centre for those who wanted to have some very active play. We finished with a closing circle.

At the planning stage, I wasn't sure what Covid restrictions would be in place; as it turned out there were none. To help with potential contact tracing, I kept the group size small (maximum of 16 children) and stable, with children coming each morning for the week. I would probably have done this anyway as one of the main aims was to help the children build good relationships with each other and with the adult and teenage facilitators.

The best part for me was the chance to slow down and watch the children playing together without having to rush them on to the next thing. They had a wonderful time and so did I.

Peace and compassion through Godly Play for all ages

Ali Miller

Ali Miller and Andy Miller are Associate Priest and Vicar of the Benefice of Tanfield, with Burnopfield and Dipton in the Diocese of Durham.

We have managed to livestream a Godly Play story approximately once a month (with varying camera quality because we are not particularly 'techy') and know that both adults and children engage and enjoy it! Why? Prior to Covid-19, Messy Church was already happening (and had begun just prior to Andy arriving as incumbent, so it would have been difficult to stop this to do something else) so over time he had begun introducing Godly Play stories as the worship element to these sessions. As you'd expect (trust the method!), the children and their parents were really beginning to engage with the storytelling and wondering. Alongside this, in January 2020, we set up the 'Wonder Club' – a monthly Godly Play story session for children. We were three sessions into the year when lockdown began! We had used Godly Play in Bible Study and Confirmation Classes for adults, so Godly Play had to be part of our online offerings.

Each month Andy sends out activities and prayers to our Messy Church families that link with the Godly Play story we will be telling online. We leave the stories on our Facebook page for three weeks before removing them. Again, we know that adults are also appreciating them! In December we held an online crib service using the Godly Play



Our Advent offering – note the Vicarage cat also travelling to Bethlehem.

Christmas Eve liturgy, encouraging those who were watching at home to assemble their family crib at the same time – this went down a treat with both young and old.

We have really enjoyed being able to offer stories in this way, befriending the limitations of online provision, rather than being despondent about them! As storytellers, both learning the script and playing with the material has imparted some of the circle's 'Sacred Space' ambience of curiosity, calm and joy to us during the more frazzled parts of this pandemic ... God's peace and compassion visiting us through this channel! I wonder which story we will tell next.

A parable under an oak tree

By Jo Apps

Jo Apps is a licensed lay children's minister working in the church and local primary school.

A couple of weeks after schools re-opened in June, I approached the head teacher and asked if I could come in to lead a Godly Play session. I'd seen a photo of my child taking part in a music lesson outside, and it looked like a Godly Play circle. My offer was accepted so I began to think about how I could adapt Godly Play to be 'Covid-safe' for the children and myself.



I picked location in the shade of an oak tree and used the Parable of the Mustard Seed. I planned to stay as close as possible to the usual format: though I was concerned about response time, especially with children not being allowed to share materials or play with the story. I travelled light, taking my triptych image of Christ, a small round wooden tray and a Christ Light, which I changed for a candle in a glass jar to protect the flame from the breeze. I sat on a picnic mat, with a cushion and the parable box. The children brought their own cushions and with a bit of guidance arranged themselves in a circle.



As we shared the story, we were interrupted by birds flying in and out of the tree above us; we had all the time we needed, so we allowed time for these interruptions and to wonder about these birds. Then a ladybird flew down, stayed awhile and flew off in the direction of the pre-school. We wondered what the ladybird had heard, and who she was going to tell our story to? Hands had been

sanitised, so I invited the children to lay a bird or a nest in a place that was right for them. Then I noticed that one of the children was playing with leaves and twigs and things from the ground around her – she was building a nest. That was it, all the children wanted to build a nest. I hadn't needed to bring response materials: God had provided all that we needed.

I retold this story three more times before the end of term, once in the school hall (with doors wide open) as the weather was cooler and the ground damp; however, we could still go outside to find materials on the field to build our own nests or to look for nests in the trees. My strategy was to go with what felt right and trust that God was in all we were doing. After such a long time without sharing Godly Play face to face it was a very special experience for all of us to be in a circle, wondering together again.

Play in a Plague Year – Across the World



Finding ways to play during the pandemic in Hong Kong

By Kevin Ma and Helen Chan

Kevin and Helen are Godly Play Trainers in Hong Kong.

When churches and schools were closed, we called the families asking if they had enough masks and sanitisers and made delivery rounds to those in need.

We posted letters to them weekly, inserting a photo and script of a Godly Play story, along with some at-home response options. Some of them wrote (or drew) back, telling us the art they did, the books they'd read, the food they'd cooked and the people they'd met. We asked those in difficult situations if they would welcome a visit, and then drove by their homes on Sunday mornings. We met them outside, showed them books and art materials, invited them to choose some to take home and finished with a 'feast' of prayer and blessing.

We encouraged the Godly Play community to be unapologetically creative. Some teachers opened up their homes for Godly Play; others did Godly Play at parks and beaches and let the children explore as response. One 10-year-old girl, who had at first refused to let her feet touch the sand, told the teacher afterwards that she had made ten new friends at the beach ('the sand, the water, the seashells...'). When the pandemic eased, but with churches still closed, we invited our children to meet for Godly Play weekly at a secret location. The space was smaller, messier and password-protected, but the children came week after week, escorted or not. Like the 11-year-old girl whose parents had signed their divorce papers a few weeks earlier, who got down on her knees one Sunday morning, grabbed her dad's legs and cried, 'If you don't let me go to church (the secret location) today, I won't let you go to work. Please let me go to church!' Her father, whom we are told hates everything Christian, yielded.

Godly Play in South Africa during Covid-19

By Joan Truby

Joan is a Godly Play Trainer in South Africa.

At the beginning of 2020, on a typical Sunday morning in my church, nearly forty children attended Godly Play. The last Sunday we met before lockdown was fraught with sanitising hands and serving the feast safely, using routines which were still quite foreign to us at that stage, and feeling anxious about what lay ahead.



In November 2020, I walked into the Godly Play room like a time-traveller as I looked around at the sacred space that had stood empty for a long eight months but remained unchanged while the world had altered dramatically. It felt quite surreal, but it was wonderful to be in the circle again. I had intentionally left the church calendar where it had been at lockdown, and a child moved its hand from the middle of Lent, to the first day of Advent.

Few of our parishioners returned to church when permitted, and likewise, our Godly Play circle has only had between two and six children. In late December 2020, in-person church had to stop once more, and again our Godly Play room faithfully awaits our return.

Particular challenges during lockdown have been that we were not able to connect with our children. Zoom was not practical or possible without leaving many of our group out of the circle. However, we know that we can trust the process rooted in the Godly Play sessions the children had before, and we know the stories will continue waiting for our return, whenever that may be.

Going forward we would like to focus on introducing *Stories of God at Home* and empowering families to use Godly Play in worship at home. We look forward to the journey with excitement as we believe that this can make a real difference for our children and their families.



Meeting the challenge in Germany

By Birgit Holstein & Sheila Whittenberg

Birgit and Sheila are members of the German trainer team.

Last year has been such a mixed bag: a year filled with challenges, fears, losses, and questions, but also with blessings and creativity. We crossed new thresholds, walked through newly opened doors and learned new ways of doing things, often requiring us to step outside of our comfort zones.

The Godly Play Germany family reacted to the demands of this unforeseen situation in a strong, supportive way. Thanks to modern technology and gifted people with the necessary know-how, Godly Play did not come to a standstill. Instead, we explored new ways of engaging others and building the circle. Videos were produced, lessons were live-streamed, and events were held online. The use of digital platforms allowed us to resolve problems, answer questions and discuss issues of good practice. Each digital offering, whether live or recorded, was prepared with care in order to recreate the atmosphere and spirituality of Godly Play in the best possible way. We supported each other and learned from one another in many different ways. Networks of relationships within the local and international Godly Play communities were also a huge help as we worked together.

But we really do miss being together in the Godly Play room with the children. It has been sad to cancel various events, and we are uncertain about the effects that the changes will have on our children, communities and churches. But knowing that God is everywhere, we trust that God's blessings will be with the most vulnerable and lonely and God's comfort with the worried and weary. We wonder how things might develop this year. What else might there be for us to discover? How can we enable people to adapt even further to this situation? Our confidence is that God is with God's people.

Godly Play in times of Covid-19 in Australia

By Carolyn Handley

Carolyn is a Godly Play trainer, Spiritual Director and Retreat Leader in Sydney, Australia.

Before the pandemic, most of the children in our Godly Play circle at church were toddlers, so we have not offered Godly Play to children since the pandemic began. However, there was strong demand for more frequent retreats. After Easter I offered fortnightly 90-minute retreats on Saturdays, telling stories in Godly Play style, with record attendance. Interestingly, the adults preferred seeing me holding the story pieces, rather than seeing photos of the pieces. A strong sense of compassion grew at this time of physical isolation, as we shared and prayed for one another. One participant said, 'I have got to know all of you so much better in these retreats than I have in years at church.' We squeezed in one spaced-out retreat in the church building in December, between lockdowns (see photo).



Godly Play during remote learning in Queensland

By Kathrin Koning



Kathrin is Chaplain of Matthew Flinders Anglican College, Buderim, Queensland in Australia.

It was just over eight weeks after beginning my new job as College Chaplain, when we went into remote learning. In order to maintain a chaplaincy presence in the community, I launched into developing a new skill-set: making iMovies!

The vacant chapel gave me the opportunity to set up my Godly Play resources from school, and to practise transforming the chapel into a Godly Play room. Then I used the remote learning weeks and my iMovie learning curve to introduce the school community to Godly

Play via the College intranet.

First, I simply filmed the space, pointing out the different shelves and stories, and explaining the process of Godly Play. Then, because we were going into Holy Week, I filmed and published one story a day (my own story for Palm Sunday in Godly Play style, the Mystery of Easter, the Faces of Easter, the Synagogue and Upper Room, and the Story of Holy Week). After Easter I filmed and published one plaque of Knowing Jesus in a New Way each week. There was positive digital feedback.



The College Chapel of St Nicholas as it is mostly used. (Please note: the wall hanging now is a permanent fixture!)

When students were back on campus in May, the Year 1 teachers brought their classes of 6–7-year-olds, even making time to allow the students response time after the wondering. Whenever I meet those students now, they ask: 'When can we come again?'

We are fortunate in schools: Covid restrictions are different for students. The children can physically gather in a circle for a story, though they must apply hand sanitiser upon entry; and we repeat that before they move into response time and upon leaving, just as they do in the classroom.

In a time of uncertainty and separation, Godly Play was able to draw people together through story and wondering.

Godly Play in Lockdown Irish-style

By Cora O'Farrell

Cora O'Farrell is a Trainer in Ireland.

The first strict lockdown of the 12 March 2020 brought a cessation to the activities of Godly Play Ireland storytellers, with our usual loci for presentations (parishes, schools and universities), being abruptly shut down. The pivot to online delivery, while not ideal, was the only option available.



Casting aside our fears and ineptitudes with technology, we embraced the new technology offered to us by the Zoom platform. During April a group of eight storytellers met virtually on several occasions and shared plans and expertise with one another. This resulted in the production of videos of suitable presentations for Easter which were made available to parishes and schools, as well as Godly Play sessions being offered live online. We were pleased with what we had achieved, and we were all in agreement that the opportunity to meet, plan and collaborate in this manner had been a fruitful process and a delightful discovery.

The week of 20 July 2020 was an important one for Godly Play Ireland. We were blessed to be able to proceed with face-to-face trainings in County Kildare (a county which was in full lockdown a week later!). On Monday, elements of training for three Godly Play trainers were delivered; on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, we had Core Training; and on Friday we gathered a new circle of Godly Play Ireland as we formed our first group of Advocates. Although socially distanced, this galvanised our community's leadership. Since that time, we have met online on a monthly basis to study some writings of Jerome Berryman and to share good practice.

Our video productions and live online presentations continue as we are in yet another lockdown, and our repertoire has extended to live streaming of Godly Play sessions on social media platforms. We are very grateful to the Godly Play UK Facebook group where many useful ideas have been garnered.



Using the unexpected time productively

By Katie Velghe

Katie Velghe writes on behalf of Godly Play Flanders

When Covid-19 forced us into a lockdown, at first, we thought we'd have to postpone all of our Godly Play activities until life returned to 'normal'. Core courses, the Godly Play Conference at Mechelen in 2020, circles with children, intergenerational activities, workshops and introduction days were all cancelled, and everybody felt sad about this.

Soon we realized that we could use the new free time productively, starting with the translation of *The Complete Guide*

to *Godly Play* into Dutch, in fruitful and pleasant cooperation with Godly Play Nederland. In early spring 2021 we'll be welcoming *Godly Play Verhalenboek 4!*

We also discovered that the lockdown needn't stop us supporting our storytellers: we started organizing digital workshops, which attracted great interest. Apparently, it was more feasible to grab a coffee and join a Zoom meeting than to make a one-hour drive to a Godly Play room. The threshold was lower, and we were happy to meet storytellers we had hardly ever seen at 'live' training events. We also organized Zoom workshops for storytellers working in different settings. Teachers, catechists and caregivers from all over Flanders met each other, often for the first time, and shared their knowledge and experience.

We are still wondering how much further we can go down 'the digital way'. Whereas many of us have doubts about the possibility of having a full Godly Play experience on Zoom, we were struck by the strength of digital Godly Play meetings organized by pioneers at the Godly Play Foundation and Godly Play UK.

At the same time storytellers are exploring how to 'translate' the Godly Play spirit in non-digital ways: sending playful cards or making phone calls to the children in their circles, creating safe spaces by listening to them, or going on 'corona-safe' walks together.

After all, digitally or non-digitally, we never want to stop wondering: 'What does this child need?'

Looking back on 2020, wondering about 2021, in New Zealand

By Elke Keeling

Elke is a Godly Play Trainer in New Zealand.



On reflection, it seems to me that Godly Play in New Zealand is like a young growing seedling and 2020 provided us with opportunities to nurture the soil it is growing in.

While the March lockdown caused the cancellation of all our onsite training events, we used the time to deepen the richness of our soil in various ways:

- We had time to deepen our practice as trainers, meeting via Zoom on a weekly basis to deepen our understanding of the stories and supporting each other in a year full of national and personal crisis. Reflecting on the stories was a valuable and wonderful gift.
- Zoom provided a way to connect with anyone around New Zealand for support, training and individual consultations. Consequently, we are supporting some developing hubs that we hope will become centres where people can see and experience Godly Play. This new regional soil is being prepared for further seedlings to grow.
- Online meetings and consultations have helped us to connect with people that we would otherwise find it difficult to visit.

While New Zealand weathered the storms of Covid-19 reasonably well, I think our resilience has grown out of the way we have survived other recent crises, like the Christchurch earthquakes and terror attacks. Many have sprung into action to walk alongside people during the pandemic, and often a Godly Play circle and/or process has played a part in that.

Whether it has been personal growth, growth of a circle or community growth, we have faced an existential crisis with courage and resilience based on kindness and care. Godly Play stories and practices have played their quiet, transformative part through the movement of God amongst his people as we tell stories, wonder and share concern for each other.



Godly Play in Switzerland

By Monika Auzemery

Monika writes with trainers from Suisse Romande.

The suspension of meetings in a circle resulted in the transfer to the virtual sphere: Zoom, Facebook or other online meeting platforms. This was time-consuming and laborious. We identified three types of meeting:

- short stories recorded and made available on YouTube, with the possibility of watching in a family circle
- live meetings with storytelling and shared response with a storyteller and the usual circle of kids (and sometimes their families)
- conducting the meeting in a room using the online application, having previously distributed materials (e.g. paper figures for a parable), response time, and finally taking the feast from the bags and eating together.

Positive things we've observed in these virtual meetings:

- Godly Play is an easy method to film and show on screen
- it helps us maintain relationships with children who are happy to see us. It is therefore important that the person who records the stories is the person who conducts the session.
- it's better than nothing
- it's important to use beautiful materials because all the details are visible when the camera zooms in
- videos can be enhanced with subtitles for children who are hearing-impaired, or signing can be incorporated

And the negatives:

- there is no sensory side, children cannot touch the resources or feel them with their hands
- we can only convey a visible image: the non-verbal side is missing, which we can feel only in the presence of children in the circle
- we think that the whole dimension of the mystery is missing. A recorded session never feels complete; something is missing
- it's not possible to replace the real GP session by a recording or virtual session
- no children are present with the storyteller
- very often one child speaks and monopolizes the meeting, while the others can only listen
- sometimes when a session is too long, we observe that the children become bored in front of their screen.

During this time of lockdown life, we tried to work more on translations, read books and learn more about Godly Play, Montessori education and childhood spirituality.

We have noticed that we lack faithfulness to the assumptions of the methodology, that often people inspired by Godly Play create various stories and performances with the aim of attracting children and families. However, this has nothing to do with the spiral curriculum and the main purpose of the method we read about in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*. This is a source of disappointment because the method is not used in all its beautiful integrity.

Feature articles

‘Are you ready?’ The Threshold: a place to pause *By Peter Privett*

Peter is one of our founder Godly Play UK trainers and he has recently taken up the role of Lead Trainer. We are so grateful to him for undertaking the task of guiding us during this time of wilderness, unprecedented change and adaption. In his writing at present, Peter is investigating the potential of the different phases of a Godly Play session. This article is a summary of a chapter on The Threshold.



‘Samuel was lying down within the temple where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!”’ (1Samuel 1.3-4)

‘We stand in life at midnight; we are always at the threshold of a new dawn.’ (Martin Luther King Jr.)

‘Suffering can be likened to be a baptism – the passing over the threshold of pain and grief and anguish to claim a new state of being.’ (George Eliot)

‘This is the solstice, the still point of the sun, its cusp and midnight, the year's threshold and unlocking, where the past lets go of, and becomes the future; the place of caught breath.’ (Margaret Atwood)

In Chapter 2 of *Teaching Godly Play*¹, Jerome Berryman writes about the importance of crossing a threshold, and the role that the door person has in helping participants engage with the whole Godly Play process. This foundational chapter explores some of the theory and practical implications that enable the management of and movement through a threshold experience.

A complex picture



Photo by Infrogmations of New Orleans CC BY-SA 30

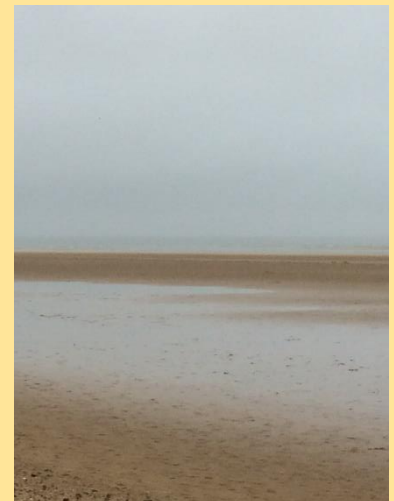
The origin of the word ‘threshold’ is simple. It relates to the evolution of dwellings at the dawn of agriculture in human civilisation. It describes the threshing space for grain at the entrance of a dwelling, stamping on a wooden board in a doorway, to break the husks so that grains are ready for the hand grindstone.

But of course, this has developed, and the term has come to have dense connotations.

In the world of architectural design, threshold is a key concept. Simply, it is a barrier space, separating one area from another. For some

architects it is more, involving not just a physical space but psychological, economic, emotional, and social dimensions.

The architect, Christopher Alexander, is perhaps the most significant exponent of this. His book, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*², written with Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein in 1977, is still one of the best-selling books on architecture. ‘Pattern’ is deliberately understood in an ambiguous way. The authors explore the issues and problems that confront us communally and individually and offer ‘patterns’ whereby these might be resolved. Threshold, on one hand, is the means by which you enter and leave a building, how you isolate the inside from outside, and how you protect it from the forces of nature. But it involves much more because it is also transitional space that has to effect a change. Its design and purpose, its ‘pattern’, is to establish enough time, to create a necessary distance between two spaces. For Alexander, mystery is key. A central part of Alexander’s architectural philosophy is an exploration of what he calls the ‘Quality Without a Name,’ a quality that permeates the heart of things that enables us to live. For him it was ambiguous, it was mystery, but the mystery is embodied in the intentional patterns used in design, in the construction and in the very fabric of the created environment itself.



¹ Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, Morehouse Publications, 2009.

² Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, Oxford University Press, 1977

A Pattern Language is decidedly intentional in its suggestion that there should be small farms at the very centre of towns and cities; running water shallow enough for play, and open green spaces should be available at regular intervals. Different districts and key public buildings should have clear threshold spaces so that they give unspoken messages, an experience of transition, one that has been clearly made. *A Pattern Language* is an inspirational and highly readable vision for how towns and cities might be, and one in which threshold is key.



The ‘quality without a name’, this mysterious, multi-layered understanding is very present in the writing of John O’Donohue. In his book, *To Bless the Space Between Us*³, O’Donohue reflects on thresholds.

‘A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up.’

He draws attention to the importance of ritual at such times, ritual that is able to hold the variety of emotions and feelings. Those who find themselves on the boundary in a role of accompaniment need to be aware of how it might feel for those they accompany. Imaginative empathy is called for, and

trust in the process so that, “No threshold need be a threat, but rather an invitation and a promise.’

Stop!

‘Star Wars Darth Vader actor dies aged 85’, was the headline in the press at the end of November 2020. One of Dave Prowse’s other personas was as the British road safety hero, The Green Cross Code Man, whose slogan in 1975 was STOP, LOOK and LISTEN. The friendly green giant provided a simple ritual, a threshold, that supported a safe and protected way of crossing the road, of moving from one space to another. I suggest we claim him as a Godly Play role model, someone who shows us one of the key roles in managing a Godly Play process.



In his *Dark Materials* trilogy, Philip Pullman explores the need to prepare oneself, learning to let go of expectations, and realising the need to be fully open ‘in order to attain new knowledge or some kind of personal growth or movement forwards’.

³ John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, Crown Publishing Group, 2008

Both Lyra and Will have to inwardly prepare themselves before they can use the magical tools – the alethiometer or the ‘subtle knife’. In both cases, this involves a calming process of emptying the mind. Lyra has to stop and let go of any preconceived expectations. She needs to be content with not knowing, for only then does the alethiometer begin to point to possible ways forward. Will has to pause and clear his mind in order to feel the possible edges that separate the different worlds that can be cut by the knife. Whilst trying to rescue Lyra from Mrs Coulter, the threshold experience is disrupted by memories of his own mother, and this disruption of the emptying process results in the destruction of the knife. Pullman suggests that this ability to let go, of being open, is an intuitive quality of youth.

Lyra as a child quickly learns how the alethiometer works. In the later novels, when she is an adult, this innate natural ability is lost and the recovery of skills in order to read the alethiometer appropriately involves further study, effort and determination.

STOP to be aware of a child’s moment of threshold.

LOOK at what you notice about it.

LISTEN to what this might be saying to you.

How easy or difficult is it ‘to let go – to be content with not knowing’?

Get ready!



Crossing thresholds is a natural part of children’s lives. The call of ‘Ready, steady, go’ before a game gives that moment of preparation before the race is run.

‘It’s time to get ready for school’, might be a more complex and multi-layered example. There might be many thresholds to be negotiated. It may be that the call itself is enough, or the putting on of the school sweatshirt, switching off the morning TV programme, packing the bag with reading books or lunch. The journey, either by car or

on foot, may also be part of the “getting ready” process. Then, having negotiated these, children face the whole experience that is presented at the school gate; for some an easy transition, but for others depending upon age and circumstances, a time of difficulty, distress and disturbance.

As a primary-school teacher in the late 1960’s, I experienced the calling of the morning register as more than just a legal recording of names. It was also part of that threshold experience. The ritual calling of ‘Marie, Marcus, Dean, Sally,’ with the individual reply of, ‘Here Mr Privett,’ is now gone, replaced with the click on the smart board. But a signal has been made that there is movement, both physical and emotional, from one place into another, from the world of home to the world of school.

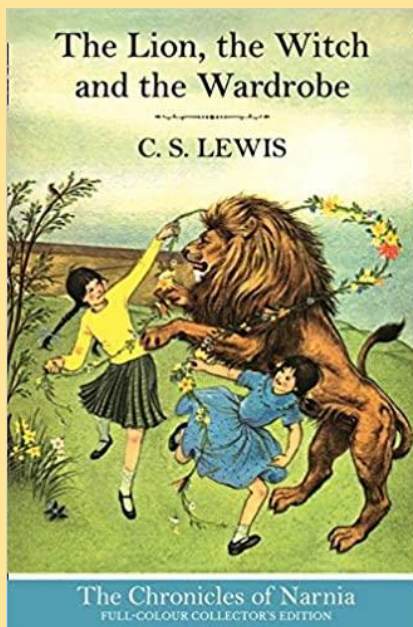
Of course, the description above may be blown apart with the experience of lockdown during the current Covid-19 crisis. Some of the familiar rituals may have been replaced with others. For some it may be that the loss of routine causes confusion and uncertainty.

One eight-year-old recounted her process for getting ready for 'Zoom school.' She has six hours a day, and the process of washing, dressing and having breakfast was the part of her threshold experience. Her father then gets the computer ready. The teacher appears on screen saying 'Right guys! Let's start!' Her comment to me expressed a desire for a little more preparation. 'He could at least say, "Hello! How are you?"'

What might you really need?

Some explorations of threshold look at the minimum that is required to enable someone to perceive a change. For example, this might involve placing a person in a darkened room, gradually increasing the light and asking them to notice the moment of change. In other words, what is the lowest or weakest level of stimulation that can be detected through light, sound, touch, smell etc.?

Applying this to the threshold experience in Godly Play, what might be the absolute minimum required to enable someone to enter a Godly Play space? Is it that you are asked, 'Are you ready?'? Is it the fact that there is a door at which they must pause before entering, or even, where there is no actual door, a stopping place? Is it a smile or being welcomed by an adult sitting on a chair at the door?



Let us explore a threshold described in a well-loved classic of children's literature, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Four children are evacuated, due to air raids, to 'the house of an old professor who lived in the heart of the country ten miles from the nearest railway station and two miles from the nearest post office.'

In almost the first sentence of the book, we are transported geographically to a liminal setting, a place on the edges of things. Not only is the geographical landscape a liminal space, but the experience of evacuation is also an in-between time, a temporary moment, a time of transition. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy all experience that moment in the wardrobe where, as Wayne Smith⁴ describes, 'coats transition into trees and mothballs transform into snow and the children begin moving toward their new birth as Narnian royalty.'

This transition, this threshold, involves no keeper of riddles – there is no adult deciding who is in and who is out. This is not about right answers to questions. Smith highlights the fact that the very nature of the threshold experience is secretive, known only to the children themselves. Like Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, in the lands of wonder and the looking glass, the transition from one world to the other is made by the children themselves. In fact, the Professor, when he learns about their journey, encourages them to be cautious about revealing their experiences.

He is in a sense a guardian, an un-sphinx-like presence. He understands the vulnerability of the children and their exposure to adults and others who might not

⁴ Wayne G Smith, 'The Space Between: observations from the threshold': Chapter 10 in Rob Fennel (editor), *Both Sides of the Wardrobe: CS Lewis' Theological Imagination and Everyday Discipleship*, Resource Publications, 2015

believe or understand. In later novels we learn that, as a child, he has indeed been part of that experience in a different way. Here is an adult who still remembers and understands the fragile and delicate implications. He also comprehends that the very nature of threshold cannot be controlled and commanded. At the end of the novel, the children are reminded that they won't be able to enter Narnia through the wardrobe again: other, unexpected routes will present themselves. Each threshold experience has to be new.

The threshold of the wardrobe enables the children to enter the Narnian experience and discover its many implications for their lives. At times, the threshold highlights the divisions and fractures in the children's relationships with one another. Lucy is dismayed that Edmund, who has had the same experience, is contemptuous and scornful. Even Peter and Susan who are normally understanding, are unbelieving and dismissive.

The restoration of relationship is a key theme on the other side of the threshold. There is the difficult and sometimes painful restoration of the children's relationship with one another. Narnia itself has to be restored from its constant fracture due to endless winter in its many guises. Here is a threshold that has got stuck: the seasonal relationship needs to be repaired. There is also the wider relationship of being the ultimate destiny of the children. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy discover that passing over the threshold means that they are not just Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, but Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve.



How do you balance being a guardian and allowing children to do it for themselves?

What does 'relationship' really mean at the Godly Play threshold? Where do you see and experience it? What does it involve?

What insights are transferable to other settings?

More than the beginning



Examining the Godly Play process, we notice that 'getting ready' doesn't just happen at the beginning of a session but appears time and time again. One 'getting ready' leads into another. The door helps an individual get ready for the group forming process, which in turn gets the group ready for story, and the story gets the group ready for wondering. The pattern goes on for response, feast, blessing and exit. Like the old children's song of the old woman swallowing a fly, each section leads to the consequence of the next. The whole Godly Play process itself is full of thresholds, and each part needs awareness and sensitive accompaniment.

But there is also another sense in which threshold is integral to the Godly Play experience or similar encounter. The theory of 'threshold concepts,' explores those moments when it feels that there is a block to a new perception or understanding, those moments of transition where there is an inner resistance. The theory also explores those moments when what was thought inaccessible is now

available: threshold moments, that signify and enable a change of seeing, a change of perception, a new way of being. A portal has been breached and opened. The theory also suggests that once through, having negotiated the threshold, these new perceptions are irreversible, transformative and integrative.

One characteristic of John's Gospel is the predominance of metaphors about 'seeing'. The English language translations use the word 'see' to cover different ways of understanding that word. In the original Greek text, this is much clearer, as different words highlight the variance between physical seeing, seeing as something understood, and seeing as deep, life-changing perception. The Fourth Gospel really plays with symbolic insight, the movement from 'I see' to 'I SEE'.



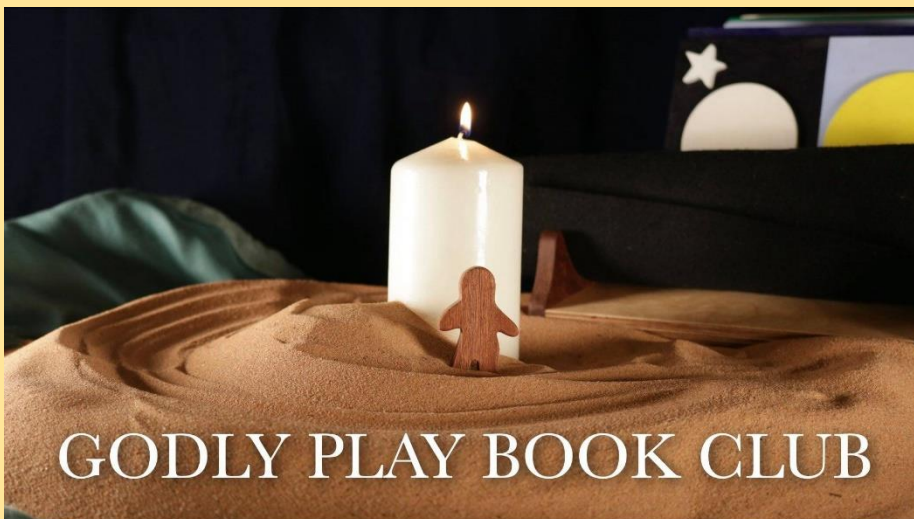
I suggest that the whole Gospel deeply reflects the idea of threshold, an invitation to explore and play with 'threshold concepts.' The very first words set the tone: 'In the beginning...' The subsequent writing offers many threshold moments, between water and wine, between bread and life, between sight and blindness, light and dark and finally death and resurrection. These are the threshold moments, sacramental moments when boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the human and the divine, become intimately entwined.

The language of seeing invites us to cross over into new ways of perception, to be born again.

Threshold as a metaphor, a sign, a parable? I wonder what it might really mean?

Godly Play Book Groups

By Michelle Brown and Sian Hancock



Michelle is one of the trainers for Godly Play Scotland and lives near Edinburgh, while Sian is a Godly Play UK trainer and lives in Bristol. Despite the vast physical distance between them, they were able to write this article together.

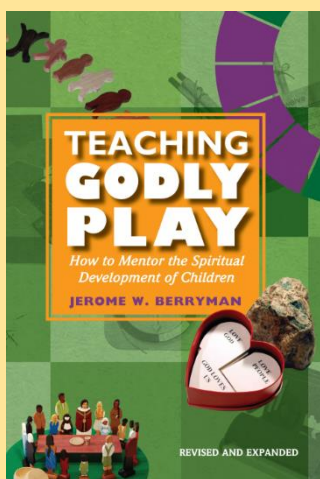
Early last year, a small group of Godly Play Scotland trainers and

trainers-in-training began meeting every other week on Zoom for storytelling, wondering and discussion; it was a form of mentoring. We decided to shape an hour of each call around discussing a chapter of Jerome Berryman's book, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*. In re-reading this excellent book, reflecting

on our own Godly Play practice and discussing it together, the four of us were further developing our understanding of Godly Play, but also finding connection, laughter, and support.

When the trainers from Godly Play UK and Godly Play Scotland met together to think through online support and training options for our shared communities, Michelle suggested we consider book groups. Thinking about the experience that Godly Play Scotland experience, it felt like it could be something that could support continuing professional development and networking connections of storytellers, advocates and trainers. Perhaps a variety of books could be read from Jerome Berryman and also Rebecca Nye. This could also be a way to introduce people to Godly Play through reading books together on children's spirituality. My fellow trainers were enthusiastic about the idea, and a team led by Judy Yeomans, Sian Hancock and Michelle planned a pilot book group.

A pilot study identified roles



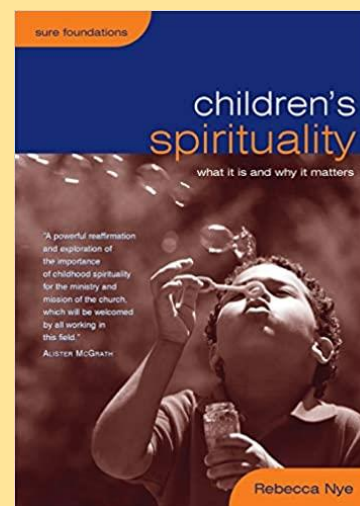
The pilot book group ran in July and August 2020 and studied *Teaching Godly Play*. The participants were a mix of advocates and trainers. As a team we had clear roles. Judy acted as administrator, communicating directly with participants before the launch and then between sessions. Each week we began by lighting a candle and taking time to build the circle. This 'circle-building' usually related to the content of the chapter being focussed on that week and acted as a good primer to our wondering questions. Michelle and Sian took turns to build the circle and facilitate the discussion, whilst Judy acted as Doorperson, managing the Zoom waiting room and facilitating the closing Godly Play UK blessing with objects to build up a picture for a reflective ending.

These rituals supported the weekly discussions and enabled everyone to relax into the sessions. Participants commented on the 'Godly Play way' that the group was planned and delivered. The discussions were a mix of sharing insights and going deeper in response to a set of wondering questions. There was a lot of learning from one another as experiences were shared. Revisiting this foundational book encouraged us all to reflect on our Godly Play practice.

This team has gone on to deliver other reading groups working with another member from the pilot group. In Scotland, Michelle and Katie McGlew looked at Rebecca Nye's book *Children's Spirituality: What it is and Why it Matters*. This online series enabled those in very rural settings to connect and even included a wonderful opportunity for Rebecca to join the group for a final Q&A. Michelle said that 'One hour each week of talking about children's spirituality with a lovely group of storytellers was like medicine for my soul as we headed towards the long winter.'

A means of connection

Two groups were led by Godly Play UK and both explored *Teaching Godly Play*, though each had unique circles. The



benefits of an online group meant that whilst group facilitators Judy and Lesley Mason are in Sussex, their book group was more far-flung, including participants from beyond the UK. Meanwhile, the Bristol Godly Play Network used the book group format as a means to re-connect with others in the area.

A few adaptations were made to the pilot format to include an Australian blessing with appropriate objects to build up the picture over the weeks, and the use of video, thanks to the technical wizardry of Richard Prescott. As a team Richard, Becky Fisher and Sian rotated roles over the weeks, so the facilitators experienced each dimension as well as providing different voices for each of the elements.

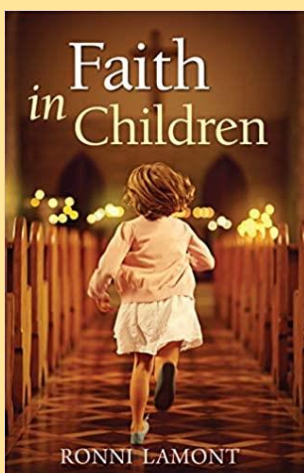
What people said

Participants from the Bristol group remarked about the book: 'It's a methodical walk/talk through the hows of Godly Play and the reasons behind each how'. Personally, they reflected, 'What a privilege to share honestly with experienced Godly Players' and 'it helped me think about my future use of Godly Play'. Considering the book group experience, 'the discipline of reading through a book together' was appreciated as was the sense of 'being connected to others and sharing experiences. Exploring the book together makes even the "bumpy bits" enjoyable'. Overall, it was felt to be a 'reaffirming' experience and safe space to grow together with our questions.

Our hope for the book groups is that as people participate, some will go on to facilitate groups with their regional networks to encourage connection and discussion on these important books amongst Godly Play storytellers. There are many books and even articles we could explore.

Taking your wondering further...

Reviews: Books to take your wondering further...



Faith in Children

Ronni Lamont, (2020) Monarch (Lion Hudson IP Limited); ISBN 9780857219510

A Review by Trudie Morris

A good book for me is one that takes me on a journey and leaves me with questions. Ronni Lamont's *Faith in Children* does not disappoint. The title is designed to make the reader think about the faith of children and the faith of adults in children. What is not immediately apparent is who the book is for and why? There is no subtitle to lend a hand to potential readers. However, once you glance inside at the index page, it is clear that the book is written for those working in children's ministry who want to

improve their practice. Throughout the book there is a lot of advice about how to do that. The index itself takes you on a journey from the overarching theme of spirituality, through theories of childhood, personality, social and faith development to the core argument, that Godly Play is an ideal programme for children's faith development. Of

course, Lamont is ‘preaching to the converted’ when a Godly Player like me picks up this book!

We get a clearer understanding of Lamont’s purpose in her introduction. Here we learn that this edition is a revision of her earlier work: *Understanding Children, Understanding God* (London SPCK, 2007), which in turn, drew upon her MA dissertation. Lamont has seen the need for an updated version to acknowledge that the field of children’s spirituality ‘has rapidly grown’ (p.6). We also learn that the original purpose of the book was to inform and educate her Sunday School teachers in child development when she was a vicar. Once inside, you discover that the book works as a study course and assumes you are working in a group or team with others in children’s ministry. At the end of each chapter there are questions such as: ‘How does your group help to expand the children’s religious vocabulary as you work with them?’ and ‘How could this be improved?’ (Questions for discussion, Chapter 2).

Lamont also urges her readers not to skip the opening chapters that focus upon theory. Theory is useful for practitioners to know, and if you wanted to run, for example, a 10-week course for a group of interested adults, then theory followed by practical applications may be a good way to go. For us as Godly Players, the later chapters are an affirmation of the power of Godly Play to develop and deepen the spirituality of children and adults working with children. Weaving the theory into this practice could avoid the sense of a book of two halves, where we all want to reach the chapters that appear most relevant.

As a priest researcher, I particularly value the research elements Ronnie Lamont brings to the table of working in ministry with children. There are few researchers working in the field today who give us the voices of children. Lamont gives us gems such as: ‘I say to myself, “I wouldn’t be here if God didn’t make the world”’ (Andrew, nine years old, p.147). Of course, we hear theology like this all the time in the Godly Play circle, but I wonder whether Lamont shows us how the voices of children not only improve our ministry with children but deepen our spirituality. It is good to hear these voices but what is the purpose? What I miss here is an emphasis on the importance of the agency of children.⁵ This is particularly important to the chapter on intergenerational worship. So much is written about children and what they need (which usually means what adults think children need) but qualitative research giving a voice to children is still hard to come by, despite the ground-breaking work of, for example, Rebecca Nye and Kate Adams.

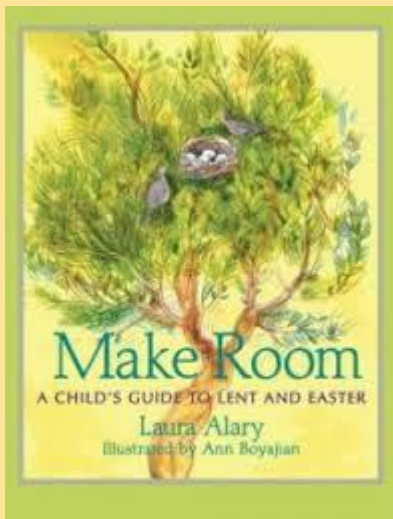
It is important for potential readers to note that Ronni Lamont’s research was undertaken in a Church of England ecclesial context, and the book is written from that perspective. Though other denominations are acknowledged, and some Church of England jargon explained, a lot is assumed. This could be off-putting for ministry teams and individual readers from other denominations. Chapter 13 for example, focuses upon children and communion in the Church of England. You might need to adapt the first question for discussion at the end of the chapter – ‘How do you think your church would view children receiving communion before confirmation?’ (p.192) – or decide it is not relevant for your context. Indeed, if you are not part of a ministry team, you might

⁵ *Discovering attentive presence: children as agents for spiritual change in the curatorial of worship*, International Journal of Children's Spirituality, DOI: 10.1080/1364436X.2019.1711025 (2020)

wonder at times if the book works for you, with the questions for groups and focus upon 'your ministry team'.

This is a book well worth reading and Chapter 12 ('The way forward: growing faith') in particular makes a useful contribution to the ongoing issue of intergenerational worship. Lamont presents a sound argument for all-age worship and storytelling, including Godly Play in an intergenerational context, that I think most involved in children's ministry, whether lay or ordained, will welcome. It is really good to read of another priest researcher promoting intergenerational thinking!

A priest in the Church of England and a practical theologian, Trudie Morris is an Advocate for Godly Play UK. Her doctoral research examined her practice in co-curating the Eucharist with children and she learned that the spiritual experiences of adults are deepened when they witness children attentively carrying out liturgical actions in worship. Trudie continues to explore the importance of children as agents in all-age worship. She writes, gardens, walks, and plays whenever she can.



Make Room: A Child's Guide to Lent and Easter
Laura Alary, author and Ann Boyajian, illustrator; (2016)
Paraclete Press; ISBN 978112616599

A review by the Bell family

This beautifully illustrated book interweaves three themes: the changing colours and seasons of the natural world, the life and teaching of Christ, and the ways in which children and families may respond to that teaching during Lent and Easter, both as part of a church family and through everyday practices at home. A section on 'Making space' presents the parable of the leaven, and the parable of the mustard seed, and describes planting seeds and waiting for them to grow, but also clearing out unwanted toys and

possessions to give to someone who may need them more.

For a child who may have observed things being done differently in Lent – a change in the music during church services, or people around them giving things up for the season – this book may help to explain why these things are done. The author is Canadian and some of the traditions described, such as snuffing out purple candles, one for each of the six weeks of Lent, may be new to British readers. Perhaps they will inspire us to create new ways to mark this special time.

The language of the book is very resonant with the language of Godly Play: 'Long ago Jesus went out alone into the desert to get ready. Deep inside he felt that God had important work for him to do. But he needed help to see clearly the way ahead.' We are encouraged to wonder and ask questions about the stories, and to practise silence and waiting.

One of the most moving illustrations for me shows a group of adults and children watching the sun rise over a lake on Easter morning – an image of a church community,

young and old, worshipping together. Another section reflects on 'Making room', and how 'we can always make the circle bigger', for instance by looking out for other children who may be alone and excluded, smiling at them and saying hello. Children can play an important role in welcoming the stranger and helping our communities to grow.

Although the book is short, it contains a number of stories and ideas that each deserve a lot of thought and wondering. We think it would be best suited to reading aloud, a little at a time with children aged about 5-9. Perhaps families could look at it together throughout Lent. It would certainly make an excellent addition to the bookshelf in a Godly Play room.

Laura Alary has also written *Look! A child's guide to Advent and Christmas. Breathe: A child's guide to Ascension, Pentecost and the Growing Time* will be coming out later this year. Both are published by Paraclete Press.



Wild Lent: Discovering God through Creation

Rachel Summers, (2017) Kevin Mayhew;
ISBN 9781848679351

A review by Eona Bell

In the last year, many people have discovered or remembered God's gift of creation, as city parks, gardens and countryside footpaths have become places of freedom and respite from lockdown, and fresh air and the changing world of nature have helped to restore physical, mental and spiritual health. Some people have been exploring ways to take Godly Play outdoors, whether by learning from the practices of groups like Muddy Church, Mossy Church and Forest Church who have been worshipping outdoors since well before the pandemic, or simply encouraging families to be attentive and

open to wondering as they explore their surroundings, perhaps on daily walks for exercise.

This book by Rachel Summers, a Forest School practitioner and mother of young children, offers outdoor activities for the forty days of Lent, providing structure for time spent intentionally in nature, with a simple reflection and prayer to lead the reader deeper into the season. There are things to do when it's sunny, and things to do when it rains, things to do at different times of day, things to do alone, and things to do with other people. There is no prescribed order, so the reader is free to pick and choose each day, but if you want to, there is enough for the whole of Lent. The reflections follow the theme of journeying, recalling Jesus' time in the desert and our own spiritual progression towards Easter. The approach is one of openness, and readiness for surprises.

Unlike other Lent books which are often aimed at a particular age-group and may be difficult to share across generations, *Wild Lent* is a kind of Lent course which could be enjoyed equally by adults on their own, or by adults and children together. It is a book I will certainly recommend, especially to people who are unfamiliar with outdoor worship, or who like some structure and guidance for reflection.

Godly Play Materials at Home

By Kathryn Lord and Kate Caroe

Kathryn is a Godly Play UK trainer and Kate is an experienced storyteller. Both live in Sheffield. The ideas shared here are drawn from Kathryn's experience of giving resources to children who came to the Zoom Godly Play sessions offered weekly for six months during 2020 and Kate's experience of doing 'church' with her six children aged 4-17 and her husband, as well as Godly Play stories she recorded for Sheffield Cathedral's Facebook page. Further ideas derive from suggestions shared on the Godly Play UK and Knowing Godly Play in a New Way Facebook groups.



With Covid-19 and lockdowns came the exile from our Godly Play classrooms. Where was Godly Play to go? Some went online through Zoom, YouTube and Facebook; some

moved into the home and some went outside.

While it was great to connect with friends and hear stories told on the screen, something was missing when the children were not able to handle and play with the materials themselves. Godly Play is a sensori-motor approach to learning and the materials need to be in the hands of the children. But people don't have the materials at home, they can't buy them all, and they have limited room in their homes. Sharing Godly Play stories and playing with Godly Play materials at home are not the same as in a formal group setting. So what would Godly Play look like in a home?

The only possible response is that 'good enough is good enough'. The most important thing about Godly Play is the atmosphere, the peaceful, and yet playful, approach. Doing Godly Play at home will have its challenges, but the materials should not be our main concern. We can only do our best with what we've got! It might not be perfect Godly Play but perhaps there are lessons to be learned from that for the future. Maybe it is good to encourage people to take Godly Play into

their homes, where the most effective faith formation happens; to play with it, to be flexible with it and to create manageable ways of telling the stories. Perhaps we may even have to go back to the Bible because we don't have the story scripts. And even in our usual settings, perhaps it is helpful to remember that, although the beauty of the materials is an unspoken message, the Godly Play atmosphere is more important than perfect materials and words.

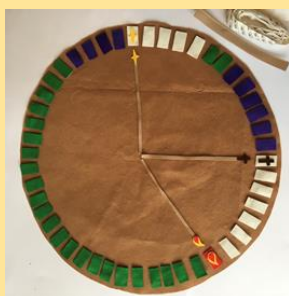
Here are some things, then, to consider.

Offer home-made Godly Play resources to each family



The materials shown here enable the telling of almost all the stories from Volumes 2, 3 and 4, plus some from Volumes 7 and 8. These resources were sent to families taking part in 'Stories to the Rescue' training. Here is a collection of materials that was sent to individual families. The materials fitted into a box with dimensions 32cm x 23cm x 10cm and the cost was under £50.

Circle of the Church Year



This just requires felt, brown hook Velcro (for the hands) and sticky-backed hook Velcro (to stick onto the weeks so they cling to the circle). Families can

make this themselves and add special days, like birthdays and other events to look forward to in the coming year.

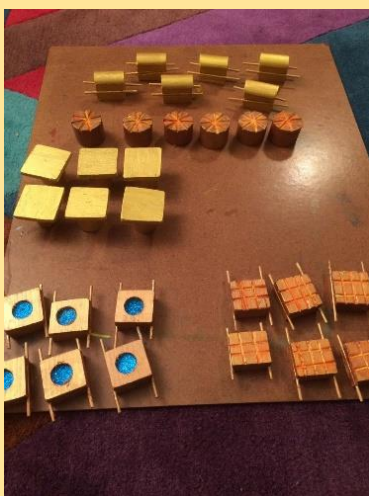
Finding your own materials: The Flood and the Ark



You might start by looking around your house to use what you already have. Try to look for beautiful things, but don't

worry if you don't have them, just use junk modelling stuff if necessary – a container for Charlie Bigham's fish pie works well as an ark! A piece of card or cloth would make a good roof. For animals use your own farm figures. Some people have made origami arks and animals.

Making it small: The Ark and the Tent



Peter Privett made mini story sets for all the families attending open-air Godly Play in Rugby. The tent is made from strong card and the artefacts have been crafted out of wood, but you can

also use card, salt dough or air-drying clay.

Making it simple: The Good Shepherd and World Communion



This story can be made together as a family using ordinary materials. This is from 'Making meaningful materials' by Bridget Steenkamp, available from Godly Play South Africa. The sheep are made from pipe-cleaners and fleece, and the people are peg dolls on salt dough stands. The chalice and paten are made from salt dough.

Using natural and found materials: The Parable of the Good Shepherd



Go outside and choose natural materials. In this example, stones of different colours and

shapes represent the sheep and the shepherd, twigs are for the sheepfold and blue petals for the water.

Using toys: The Parable of the Good Shepherd



Use the toys you have. These children chose to have unicorns in the sheepfold and specifically chose a pencil with a fluffy end 'that feels good' as part of the sheepfold.

Perhaps this will help them link the stories with their own lives, breaking down the division between sacred and secular.

A photograph of a child's sandcastle on a beach. The sandcastle is shaped like a cross and is surrounded by various wooden toys, including a cow, a pig, a sheep, and a small figure. A small wooden bowl with a figure inside is also present.

A wooden toy box is shown, filled with a variety of toys. Visible items include a large red plate, a yellow cup, a green cup, a black and yellow striped bee, a green toy gun, and a white cup. The toys are scattered haphazardly within the box.

When the beautiful Mary figure from the Holy Family goes missing, a parent's instinct might be to worry or feel annoyed,

The Feast

A woman with dark hair and glasses is smiling next to a tortoiseshell cat. The cat is looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a framed picture of a tiger on a wall with vertical stripes.

How did you first come across Godly Play?

26

week for something called Godly Play. Would I be interested? Being the sort of person who finds it hard to say no, I found myself meeting Peter Privett, becoming fascinated, seeing a few stories told on our church weekend and jumping on board! In the early days, the only UK trainers were Rebecca and Peter, so overseeing the administration for the three days was easily contained. Since then, the work has grown as Godly Play has trained more trainers, and more courses have been arranged and delivered.

Soon after I began this work, I was fortunate to attend Westminster Abbey in 2007 when Godly Play was launched as a charity in the UK. One memorable recollection from this day is being given the pedestal of flowers that had decorated Poet's Corner, where we had met, and carrying them home via Tube and train. I inwardly giggled, as I could not see over the top of them. In London no-one batted an eyelid, whereas nearer Rugby everyone commented in amazement!

Do you enjoy what you do?

I love the work that I do for Godly Play because of the wonderful contacts that I have made, mainly via email. I tend to give chatty replies rather than being too formal, and people seem to appreciate this: they feel involved; that they are welcome. It seems that quite few people arrive at their three-day course and ask, 'Where's Sheila?' expecting me to be there to welcome them.

I like order and precision – so I enjoy my spreadsheets and lists, and numbers and things that most people hate or find scary! I suppose it's that which makes me efficient, or at least I like to think so!

I then love to hear people's comments following their courses; how they feel transformed by the best training they have ever had; how it has been intense yet also felt like a retreat. That is what makes my work rewarding.

Tell us a bit about your family.

We are a small family as Rob, my husband (and a trustee of Godly Play UK) and I are both only children. Our two grown-up sons therefore have no aunts and uncles. Happily, we live relatively close to each other. We love having (and spoiling) our three-year-old granddaughter, Amber, for two days a week. A chance to play, slow down, watch worms and ladybirds, pick leaves and paint them, water the plants and spray Grandad, bounce balloons, marvel at collected shells and stones, rummage through my grandma's button tin and ice biscuits with sprinkles.

Until recently we have been the proud owners of two moggies called Bacardi and Breezer who lived to the great age of 19 years. They brought joy, delight and cuddles to our home with their antics and crazy personalities. Our house is not the same without them ... we are on the lookout for kittens!!!



What did you do in the first lockdown?

Initially lockdown was busy for me as we had to postpone many of the three-day courses that were due to run between March and the school summer holidays in July, and beyond that too. There were many people to contact, many to refund, many to rearrange, and many stories told to me of difficult family and home situations.



After a few busy weeks, life became quiet; the sun shone, and the skies were blue, every day. Along with Rob, I explored the countryside around me, found paths I did not know of, ways that I had never been, woods and ponds. We watched buds and leaves spring forth and later, full-grown crops harvested. From the start I decided to note the miles travelled during lockdown. On 27 September we had completed 874 miles which, stretched out virtually along the British Isles, took us from Land's End to John O'Groats by the traditional walking route. Since then, we have walked east to west along the Via Beata, 'Way of Blessing', a pilgrimage route with a major trail of Christian artworks to communicate God's love for people and for the country at various way stations along the route

(<https://www.viabeata.co.uk/our-dream/>). The route crosses the widest part of the Britain from Lowestoft in Suffolk to St David's in

Pembrokeshire. At the time of writing, we are approaching our destination.

Otherwise, my love of order has led me to sew yards of random threads into a canvas to create a triple image cross-stitch of a cat with attitude, turn wool into crocheted flowers, jigsaw fragments into a united whole, flour into an ornate gingerbread house and other baked delights.

Now, I must go. Another cross stitch is beckoning. It's a snakes and ladders game. Perhaps it parallels the ups and downs of 2020.

UPCOMING COURSES ONLINE

Godly Play Experience Tuesday 9 March 10 am for an hour

Cost £10

Trainers: Sue North-Coombes and Judy Yeomans

Online Introduction to Godly Play

Saturdays 13 March, 20 March and 27 March 2021

Cost £35

Trainers: Alison Summerskill, Peter Privett and Katherine Lyddon

This course will be over three x 90-minute sessions starting at 10 am on each occasion.

Booking details at www.godlyplay.uk Please share this info.

Bite-sized news

Thank you, Rachel!

Towards the end of last year, we heard from Rachel Bainton, who had served as our Lead Trainer for a couple of years, that she would lay down her training tools to take up her crafting tools every day. Rachel's business, Egg and Spoon Crafts offers, among many beautiful things, painted eggs that go well on our Easter shelves. Do take a look!

<https://eggandspooncrafts.co.uk/> Thank you so much Rachel for all that you have given to Godly Play over so many years. We all wish you well as your new adventure evolves, but we miss you lots.

Godly Play in schools on the Isle of Man *Sue Yardy is an Advocate on the Isle of Man.*

Here on the Isle of Man we are very lucky that we are free to go into schools as we once again have no restrictions or social distancing after a 'short circuit break' of three weeks in January.

During last year the Godly Play Advocates on the Isle of Man met on several occasions to allocate suitable Godly Play stories to the Primary Curriculum. This was then sent out to all 32 of the Island's primary schools in September for them to book lessons if they wanted to. We now have three schools who regularly have Godly Play in a variety of year groups; some schools occasionally have stories and others have shown an interest.

After telling the story of the Holy Family to a reception class, we were doing some wondering.

Me: I wonder which part of the story is most important.

Child: The cow.

Me: (curiously) I wonder why.

Child: Because the cow gives milk, and the baby needs milk; and the cow gave up his bed.



Photo: Copernicus Sentinel 2, ESA Wikimedia Commons

Godly Play story downloads

The publishers of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* offer individual stories as digital downloads from their website. However, these were not accessible outside North America. This has now been addressed, and Church Publishing Inc. have instituted a temporary 'fix', while they work on a more permanent solution.

International customers can now email cpieproducts@cpg.org giving their name, email address, product, and price. Someone at Church Publishing will enter their data into the digital sales platform and

they will then receive link for them to enter their credit card information. When the sales platform, Square, notify Church Publishing that payment has been received, the files will be sent to the customer.

We are grateful to Church Publishing for finding a solution to this long-standing problem.

Important note: the downloadable story texts are available from the website of Church Publishing (www.churchpublishing.org/) not from the Godly Play Foundation website.

Zooming Advocates

Annie Naylor is a Godly Play Advocate on the Isle of Man.

When the email arrived from Judy Yeomans last December it was a gift. An invitation for Godly Play Advocates to gather virtually for a Godly Play story; a retreat on a January evening. Judy had given clear instructions about what to prepare before the Zoom meeting, which helped me to get ready. Mary Cooper, doorperson, welcomed us and once everyone felt comfortable with Zoom techniques, the Christ candle was lit for us to share the light.

The rhythm of Godly Play continued with a story, 'Mary's Story' from Volume 7, and wondering. From the story, the phrases 'confusion' and 'hard to explain' seemed to resonate with life during a pandemic. There was encouragement from the phrase 'when she was all grown up, she kept growing'.

We were given a time for personal response. I realised, as one who is easily distracted at home, silent reflection is much easier for me as part of a group, even if virtual.

As we were welcomed back, we each switched on our video and audio for the feast. The circle shared experiences of maintaining Godly Play during lockdown, from making sets of materials to outside storytelling.

We all miss being in a real Godly Play circle, to feel the presence of one another. However, it was good to set aside time to join in the virtual circle, even from a small Zoom box on screen. As the light was changed, and we all left the circle, I personally felt blessed by this gift, so thank you to Judy, Mary, Katherine and all who joined the circle.



The Sussex Network bids God-speed

By Judy Yeomans



The Sussex Godly Play Network said farewell to founding member Fiona Prentice (far right) back in August. We're sad to see her go but know that she moves into the circle of the Norfolk Godly Play Network. Thank you, Fiona for all your support, especially your hospitality, hosting many of our gatherings over the last ten years.

Cambridgeshire Network Group

Sue Price, Advocate for Godly Play UK

One of the things I most enjoy about Godly Play is the way it enables me to physically engage with the stories. I remember my very first experience of Godly Play. The room had been left set up after the initial introductory

session. I went back in all by myself and just played with the parable of the great pearl. It was as if for the first time the parable began to open up, the lid had been cracked open. So, valuing that play experience so much

and since that time, working with children in a variety of ways, and seeing how through the physical playing with the stories there is a deepening spiritual experience, I wondered how it work if a Godly Play story was simply read aloud. This is the intention for a new set of stories for schools recently devised by Elisabeth Sutcliffe with Rebecca Nye, for use in collective worship during the pandemic.

Our local network has been gathering via Zoom and we had had a great experience, where one of our group shared a YouTube video of a traditional Godly Play story. Although it worked for me, I missed not being able to hold and see in 3D. However, just being together was greatly valued by the group and we had been able to engage with wondering and sharing news. At our next network Zoom meeting I offered to be the storyteller. I knew I had no props or any way of creating a YouTube video. All I had to offer were Elisabeth Sutcliffe's story scripts. It

seemed an ideal time to try one out. I deliberately chose the one about Mrs Noah and the Ark – partly because it was the most scriptural of the set, and partly because it seemed to speak most to my own experiences and therefore I hoped might speak to others.

It became a very powerful experience: somehow it was possible to become fully engaged with the story and allow our imaginations to take over so we could enter into the story without any Godly Play materials. Our sharing surprised us, as I think all of us felt unsure about how it would work. We all found something of hope, something of courage to carry on, and something that resonated with the fact that in order for there to be a rainbow, it needed to be raining. The story made us laugh, we were surprised by and enjoyed the humour. The story gathered us, held us and then sent us forward, looking out for rainbows, which are needed now more than ever.

The scripts for Class Collective Worship: Supporting Primary Pupils' Wellbeing in the Pandemic can be downloaded free of charge from www.godlyplay.uk. Developed by Godly Play UK in association with the Church Schools of Cambridge, they provide simple-to-follow material that offers pupils space to wonder and respond to Covid-19 pandemic challenges and opportunities.

Look out for our new website – coming very soon

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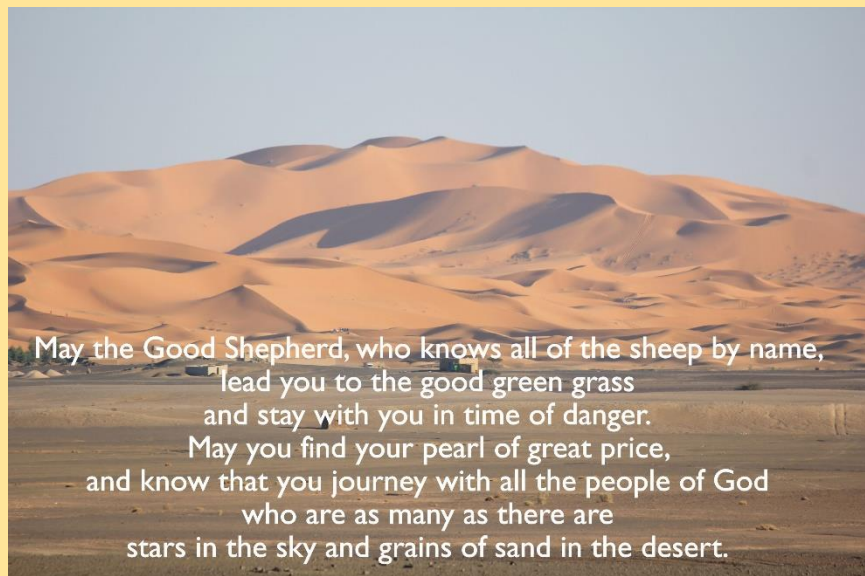
New Online offers from Godly Play UK

In response to the restrictions placed on us by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Godly Play UK trainers spent some time carefully preparing to transfer some training online and working on new ways to support Associate members and local networks of storytellers.

As many of us will know, transferring our work online takes more than just lights, camera and action (or lipstick, in my case)! Key to all our work is modelling the principles that underpin Godly Play – the way we wish to live and work in community. Creating safe space, building trust and supporting relationships are particularly important, even in the online arena, so we decided not to rush into this.

EXPERIENCE (often formerly called Taster) sessions and **INTRODUCTORY** sessions were piloted towards the end of 2020 and these are now being offered by trainers and advocates for Godly Play UK. ‘Thankful, rested, curious, inspired, hopeful, peaceful, calm, connected, heard, pondering and reflective’ were some of the words given in response to one event, suggesting that Experience sessions are popular for those who want to get a glimpse of what Godly Play might be all about, but also those who simply want the restful retreat of a Godly Play session for themselves, from the comfort of their home. A remarkable benefit is that busy people, especially clergy, can fit a 90-minute session into their day without too much additional scheduling, and we’re delighted to see more ministers dipping their toes into the peaceful waters of Godly Play.

The **BOOK GROUPS** are drawing attention too, highlighting the commitment of Godly Players to stay connected to their work even when they can’t meet in their circles. If you’d like to set up a book group, contact Judy (judyisyeomans@gmail.com) who can put you in touch with someone to help. Or you could look on our website for the contact details of a trainer near you. We’d be happy to help you on your way.



www.godlyplay.uk

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

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