

taking childhood spirituality seriously

Godly Play^{UK}

Associates of Godly Play UK

The Magazine : No. 9 Autumn 2021

Compiled by Eona Bell, Gill Ambrose,
Judy Yeomans and Peter Privett

At the threshold



I wonder what you can hear around you, as you open this issue of our magazine. Perhaps you'd like to stop reading for a minute and see how many different sounds you can hear. Writing this at my home in Cambridge, with the window open on a summer morning I can hear – but not see – a clock ticking, my neighbour drilling, the laughter of a group of teenagers walking past and the steady rise and fall of traffic noise as

cars pass by. A louder rumble must have been a bus and I think of the people on it, heading to work or maybe the hospital at the end of the route. Sounds can locate us in space and time and connect us to others – and for us as humans, words and language do so even more powerfully.

In *Teaching Godly Play*, Jerome Berryman writes that children's experience of God is essentially non-verbal, which is why the goal of Godly Play is to teach children the classical Christian language system, 'to root them deeply in the Tradition and at the same time allow them to be open to the future.' Given the importance of sound and language for our relationships with God and with people, it may seem perverse that in this issue we focus on the theme of silence. In fact, Berryman describes contemplative silence as the fourth genre of Godly Play, alongside parables, sacred stories and liturgical action. We need silence in Godly Play to 'celebrate the wholeness of the relationship with God, which is more than language can articulate.'

So, as you read on, perhaps you will pause from time to time to take a break from the words and just let yourself be still – and see what happens!

Eona Bell is an Advocate for Godly Play

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Building the circle

Thanks (once again) to all our Associates

This issue of our magazine comes with thanks and good news: thanks to our Associates for your loyal and ongoing support that has enabled some useful developments during what it seemed might be a very fruitless time. And good news about the development of new training opportunities for Godly Play in the UK. At the end of the magazine, you will discover a list of forthcoming courses, including online courses, which we find are enabling access to training in a way that has not been possible before. We now offer a ninety-minute Experience of Godly Play to people who want a first taste – to see what it is. And we also offer an online Introduction to Godly Play – four ninety-minute sessions that provide an initial training experience, with a general introduction, and the chance then to learn about sacred stories, parables, and liturgical action stories.

Godly Play Advocates

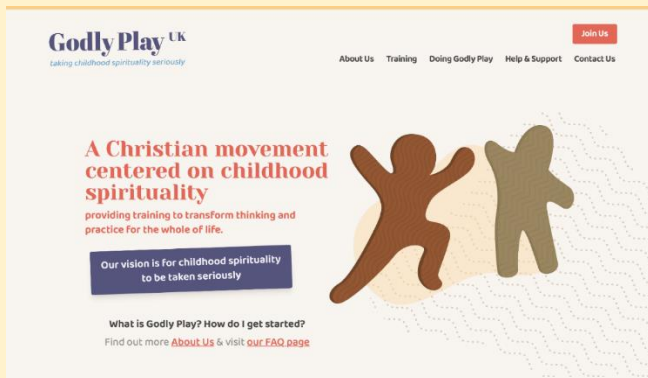
A big thank you to, and acknowledgement of, our Godly Play Advocates, who do so many things to support the work of Godly Play UK around the country. Here are some of the things they do:

- supporting trainers to run Experiences, Introductions and Book Groups online
- keeping local networks connected and meeting online, and now in person again
- supporting newly trained practitioners
- organising materials for loan
- helping to run the newly launched website
- being on the editorial team of this magazine
- and many other small, but significant things.

Godly Play Advocates are vital, and it would be great to have some more. If you think you have something to offer, or you know someone who might be interested, the first step in the process is to contact admin@godlyplay.uk so that your name can be forwarded to Mary Cooper and Katherine Lyddon, the two trainers who work with our Advocates.

Details of what is involved and an application form are here
www.godlyplay.uk/join/advocates/

Our new website



The other good news is of our new website, made possible by a very generous donation to Godly Play in the UK from Jerome Berryman. We have been able to freshen up the look, integrate some beautiful images and offer perspectives about more recent developments and opportunities. People have already pointed out what is missing from among what they valued on the old site, so we know what needs to be returned. Do let us know of

anything that you miss. With the integration of more recent technology, it is now possible to book course places online, though there is still the option to contact our administrator, Sheila Rogers (admin@godlyplay.uk), who always welcomes enquiries and takes people through whatever they need to know.



Sue Hollywell created this beautiful painting as a tribute to Louise Clark, a member of the Sussex Godly Play Network who died recently.

Louise Clark: an appreciation

The Sussex Godly Play Network was shocked by the news in April of the sudden death of one of our members, Louise Clark: an aggressive cancer took her quietly and quickly.

Her life was a wonderful tapestry, weaving God-colours and life-giving encouragement. As well as an enthusiastic practitioner of Godly Play, we knew her as a dedicated mother to three children, special needs teacher, inspirational church children's worker, conscientious school governor, avid knitter and crocheter, keen gardener, lover of nature and an integral part of Henfield's families!

She consummately lived her calling to nurture children's faith and spirituality with a deep respect for children, a lovely sense of humour and prodigious creativity. She made us laugh often (she loved using glitter; her vicar didn't!) and taught us a great deal about creating nurturing environments for children, working with their learning styles and insightful of their individual needs. She was open to making things work with what we have, open to new ways of doing things, caring for those 'outside' pulling them in: kingdom values.

We loved working with Louise on various projects including a Godly Play 'I wonder...' summer holiday club. We will miss her company and wisdom at network events, retreats and social gatherings. The Network plans to thank God for her life at our annual retreat this September by planting a fruit tree in the orchard at Penhurst where we shall gather. A poem and painting have been lovingly created as a response and to offer as thanksgiving.

Rest in peace, dancing with the divine, in the heavenly circle, dear friend.

Fiona Prentice



Yarn for Louise

Iridescent, space dust
Speckles through filigree rainbows
Arcing to earth
Spooling the thread of life - -

And here is Louise
Spun into pristine perfection
New-born
Her life-ball of yarn
Gently unravelling
With each precious breath.

Picking up the thread
Picking up speed
Tumbling, twisting, turning
Patterns emerging
Inspiration
Enabling creation.

Wondering with stories
Life being lived
Children, chores and challenges
Faith finding friends and fortitude
Life circling stories
Wonder-ful in the telling.

Then
Mid-life pandemic lands
And Garden glows
As Children grow
Family walks And talks - -

When
Suddenly
Yarn spun
Full span
Reflects
Unready
Us - - -
Her life
Complete
Work of art.
CJW 30.3.21

The photo was taken at our last Godly Players' retreat at Penhurst in 2019. Louise is 2nd from right at the front. Chris who wrote the poem, is 2nd from the right at the back. Sue, who painted the response, is 3rd from the right at the front. Fiona, who wrote this memory, is 3rd from the left at the back.

Feature articles

Hearing the Language of Silence

By Sue Price

Sue is the Co-Principal of the Margaret Beaufort Institute, a lay Catholic Institute that is part of the Cambridge Theological Federation. She is a member of the Steering Committee for the National Institute of Health Research, Health Services & Delivery Research Project, which supports 'the complete care of children and young people with life-threatening or life-shortening conditions: a mixed-method study of pastoral, spiritual and religious needs and support, and the role of chaplaincy services'. Here she shares with us some of the findings of her PhD research.



Last year I was able finally to finish my research into what I called the silent spirituality of severely disabled children. Although not explicitly named in the research, Godly Play definitely influenced my work through its child-centred focus and through my storyteller experience of working with children using attentive wondering.

I have always loved the way that Godly Play recognises the seriousness and importance of silence. Within the Godly Play structure there is time. This allows for and encourages silence, with no need to rush in to fill the gap. One of the most important parts of the storyteller's role is to be able just to sit and be with the silence, allowing it to grow and 'speak' in its own way. Holding the silence is as important as asking the next wondering question. As Rebecca Nye says, 'Children who choose not to speak are not spaces where nothing is happening. Silence can be a way of saying something so important that it can't be put into words' (2009, p.45).

Accepted and profound

I cherish the times of silence I have encountered within Godly Play such as the quiet wondering as part of the Faces of Easter as the children gather and place the objects that they want to add. I've noticed it, too, at the start of the Feast – there is a sense of satisfaction, of being refreshed and filled spiritually and physically, a quiet enjoyment that is not expressed through words, of having experienced something very deep and now it is time to feast on all that has happened in the session. I have also noticed that the quality of the silence changes and deepens as the children grow into the Godly Play process. In the first few sessions the silence is often uncomfortable, the children a bit fidgety and unsure. But it changes as they learn that they are not going to be made to speak, that it is acceptable to be silent and so over time, the silence becomes more profound.

Holding this silence can be difficult: I find Rebecca's tip of counting to seven very useful. It helps me to breath, relax and not hurry. It reminds me to wait, give time, allow the processing to unfold, and then maybe, it gives the space for those who wish to comment to do so. It is a tip I have used with many adult groups too. Although we are not doing Godly Play, by using that attitude of taking silence seriously, an attentive and contemplative space comes into the teaching session that allows for processing to take place.

I realise that for some, silence is not comfortable. I remember the well-meaning adult who came into a Godly Play session and remarked on how the children didn't seem to be engaging, as none of them were saying much. This adult didn't understand that something too deep for words was going on and made me realise that there is a need to help adults appreciate that silence is one of the languages through which spirituality can be expressed.

This appreciation of silence as a means for children to communicate their spirituality has been a major finding in my research. I started from the premise that severely disabled children's spirituality is silent and silenced. It is silent because they do not use words. Instead, they communicate non-verbally, including movement, giggles, blowing raspberries, crying and laughter and silence. Whilst much non-verbal communication uses sound, I suggested that because the sounds are not necessarily understood to be a way of communicating, these children's spirituality is silent and silenced.

Something too great for silence

I worked with six severely disabled children, who were totally reliant on their carers for all their needs. None of the children communicated using verbal language, it was not possible to hold a conversation with them. For some of them, the physical effort of making a sound was so great that their norm was silence, so that when they did make a sound, it was because something was happening for them that was too great for silence. However, it was possible to play with them if they wished.

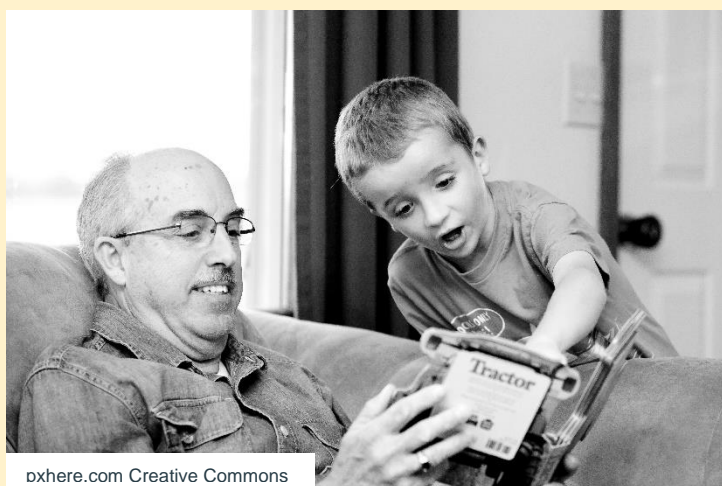
I realised very early on in the research that the most important thing I could do was to be with them and then wait and see what happened. The sessions I had with them required me to give an attentive presence, tuning into the children so that I responded to their invitations to play or responded to their invitation to simply be with them. Through being as fully present to them as I could be, I learnt a lot about these children's spirituality and about silence.

Three different ways

Jerome Berryman talks beautifully about the need to approach those who are silent with our own silence. It is a way of being present to the other, not filling that space with our needs, but holding that empty space in silence so that it may be filled with whatever the silent one may or may not wish to offer. Berryman suggests that silence is about receiving 'an opening and ...waiting for knowledge' (quoted in In Hyde, 2013 p. 122). By being able to be present to the children in my research in this way, I discovered that they

used silence in three different ways. I named these as active silence, relational silence, and silence of disengagement.

Active silence happened when the child and I were jointly doing something together – it might have been looking at a book, creating a picture or playing a game initiated by the child. This was a silence of 'doing' – it was companionable, both of us involved in the same activity.



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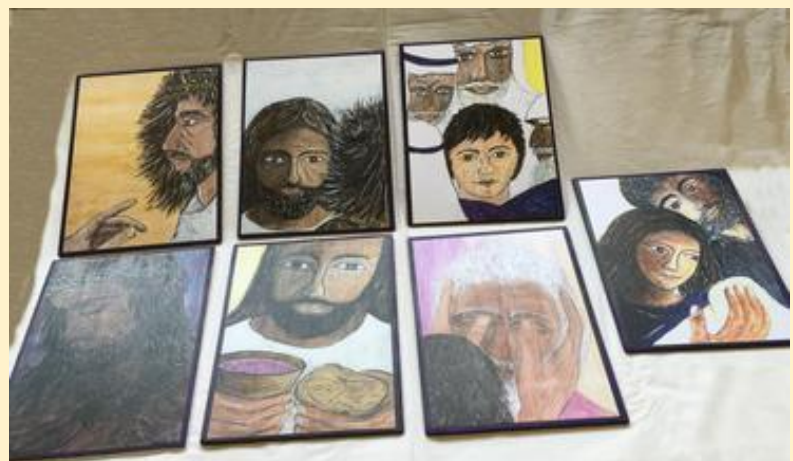
Relational silence was a silence of 'being' – it was silence when neither the child nor I were doing anything, we were simply sitting together, being present to one another. Out of that relational silence came moments in which I experienced the relational consciousness that Rebecca describes. It is that shift in relationship where both of us were relating to more than 'just me', and more than 'just the other person'. In these times of relational silence, one child very gently reached out and tickled my hand – a gesture that cost him considerable effort and a moment of very real, deep connection.

The third type of silence that I identified from my research I named as the 'silence of disengagement'. This was when the children didn't want to relate to me or anyone else, and either withdrew into themselves or sometimes simply fell asleep. They no longer wanted to interact with anyone. Having had some more time to think about this silence of disengagement, I realise that this is a very important type of silence. It is perhaps better called the 'silence of engagement with self'. It is the silence where no-one else is needed, instead the child is relating to themselves. These children did not have the verbal language to tell me what was happening in those times, but maybe through that relationship with themselves, as well as through the active and relational silences, there was a silent growing relationship with God.

The way that these children used silence to express their spirituality can, I suggest, be useful to consider within Godly Play. It leads me to wonder if the active, relational and silence of engagement with self that I identified in my research can be seen within a Godly Play session.

The Faces of Easter

I wonder if the silence that I have noticed within the storytelling of the Faces of Easter is a silence of engagement with self. It is as if the children need to absorb and take in the story without engaging with anyone else. They need their own silence to allow what Rebecca Nye, in her research with David Hay (Hay and Nye, 2006), identified as mystery sensing and value sensing that is there within that story. The incarnation and resurrection are mysteries that words cannot really explain. There is the shock and despair of the crucifixion. Perhaps there is delight or enjoyment in the miracle of healing the blind man, contrasted with the strangeness of the time in the desert. The children are touching the mystery through silence. I have noticed, too, how the silence becomes relational and active as objects are added to the story. Silently, objects are reverently placed near the pictures. I have seen children help each other if someone needs to bring something heavy, such



as the sand pot that had been used to hold the baptismal candles. Out of the silence of engaging with themselves, the children moved to awareness of each other and what each other was bringing. I wonder if this shift in the type of silence used is another way of recognising relational consciousness – that depth in children where something significant has been processed that cannot be expressed through words.



Perhaps active and relational silence can be seen in response time too. I am aware of times when a couple of children have been completely absorbed in creating a city in the desert bag, using everything that they could find, as well as burying all the people of God. This was done in complete silence but was active: without words the two children worked together, aware of one another. They happily continued with this work, until asked by a well-meaning adult what they were making: 'It's the city of God, of course....'

And I want to suggest that the contented silence at the Feast is relational silence, the enjoyment of one another's company, the sense of having worked hard and now it is time to relax together in a space that doesn't necessarily need words.

A precious gift

Silence is a precious gift for the world today. Jerome Berryman talks about the need to teach silence. One way of doing that is for storytellers to welcome and accept silence. Berryman suggests that 'storytellers... need to trust their own silence to

receive and absorb the noise of those trying to learn or trying to avoid learning, how to enter the story. If we cannot take in and defuse such noise, listeners will not be able to learn how to hear the silence' (quoted in Hyde, 2013 p. 138).

What happens in the silence is deeply powerful and moving – it becomes a space of encountering presence, and as storytellers and doorpersons, we need to become the story hearers of what is being expressed. And maybe by starting to hear the silences of action, relationality and engagement with self, not only will more of the children's spirituality be recognised and acknowledged, but we may also discover that there are even more types of silence in the way that children express their relational spirituality.

I end with another quote from Jerome Berryman (quoted in Hyde, 2013, p. 137): 'Silence is necessary for human beings to communicate and create existential meaning.' The children I worked with showed me a deeper way of understanding the language of silence. We need to listen to all children's silences, for they all have so much to tell us.

References

Hay, D. and R. Nye, R. 2006 (2nd ed), *The Spirit of the Child*, London, Jessica Kingsley; Hyde, B. (ed). 2013 *The Search for a Theology of Childhood*, Essays by Jerome Berryman from 1978 – 2009. Victoria: Moditti Press: Victoria; Nye, R., 2009 *Children's Spirituality. What it is and why it matters*, London: Church House Publishing.

Silence is a gift

By Chris Walton

Until his reasonably recent retirement, Chris Walton was a Co-Director of the Ringsfield Eco Centre in Suffolk. He is a Baptist minister whose passion is incarnational ministry. His life-long care and nurturing of children and young people resulted in his PhD research which investigated the responses of children to silent solitude in the natural world. His book, Childhood Awaits Every Person is to be published by the end of the year.



What a sacred privilege we have whenever we are with children as parents, grandparents, teachers or Godly Play practitioners. Let me make it plain from the start that I am not a Godly Play practitioner. I have been asked to write in your magazine because of my experience over some twenty years of sharing the natural world with children on residential visits at an outdoor ecological centre in Suffolk, in particular sharing 'sit spots'¹. Sit spots are simply times when the children and their accompanying adults each find a place to be alone in silence. It was never a requirement, but many children over the years wrote about this new experience. It was these responses which led me not only into a new way of attending to the awesome character of the natural world but also to the awesome nature of children. Throughout this article I share some of their responses.

'When I was at home in Holloway all my thoughts and feelings were in prison, but here in my sit spot they are all escaping and I need to jump up and catch them.'

This is a nine-year-old girl's response to her first sit spot. How often are we adults cognisant of children's inner thoughts and feelings? How often do we remember to maintain silence on this holy ground?



Innate mystics

Godly Play is a beautiful name simply because the children playing are themselves godly. My own experience has led me to reverence children as 'innate mystics'. So, it was with considerable delight that I discovered that your founder, Jerome Berryman, considers that 'children have an innate sense of the presence of God'. This should not surprise us. After all Jesus did say, as seriously as he knew how, 'Unless you become like one of these little ones you will not enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10.15).'

One-time Professor of Arts Education at the University of Warwick, Sir Ken Robinson, has eloquently described how we in the West culturally favour mind over feelings, that is, brain over body. In one of his TED talks (www.ted.com/talks/Sir_Ken_Robinson_Do_schools_kill_creativity?) he

¹ 'Magic Spots' were introduced by Steve Van Matre, Director of the Institute for Earth Education, in their programmes which we used for years in a Suffolk Outdoor Environmental Education Centre. 'Sit Spot' has become the more commonly used name. I have used the name 'sit spot' to avoid any misunderstanding or possible copyright infringement.

amusingly suggests that university professors are like a 'form of life whose bodies are regarded as merely 'transport' for their heads'! His passionate belief is that education requires the wisdom of the body as well as the brain. Wonderfully, children still have that wisdom, the natural ability to feel their bodies experiencing the present moment. For



example, here 'the sacred language [of the children] is woven, is insinuated, into the very fibers and bones of the body' (Levin, p.215).

'I enjoy the mud, I love going to the valleys and forests and basically just feeling nature.'

When we are with children we are on holy ground. We are in the presence of innate mystics. So it is vital not to assume that our task is to teach them. Rather we honour them, by being humble enough to allow them to be our teachers. Our task is to give them enough space and silence to process new bodily and spiritual experiences.

A colleague of mine, a teacher, is researching what he is calling 'created expressions of silence'. Each of his classes begins with a short time of silence (by agreement with the young students). One of the students reflected, 'Silence is a gift to those who wish not to speak.' This is not a saying from Richard Rohr or some other well-known theologian, but from a thirteen-year-old Sheffield girl!

Available and vulnerable adults

Children are often more adept at processing their own meaning than we are. Our task, as caring adults, is to enter into a relationship where we are 'available' and 'vulnerable', silently joining their world for a time, without judgment, so that the children can experience 'relational consciousness' (Hay and Nye 2006) without fear or boredom. Exploring silence and aloneness facilitates a form of spiritual wisdom that reveals new ways of being, which in turn befriend others, community and all creation, and does not result in domination or destruction.

'The thing I thought about was that I never knew it could be like this, it is amazing.'

Under the stars

Here is an often-told story of my own experience, (so often told that I once heard it told by the speaker at a conference I attended as a delegate!).

Charlie had left his jumper on the playing field. We decided to get it together because he expressed a fear of the dark. As we leapt out of the front door, Charlie let out a yell and stopped, his head buried in his hands. I asked him what was wrong, and he replied by pointing up at the sky, his head still covered by his other hand. On the starriest of nights, the moon and stars, together with the Milky Way, were all visible in an awesome display. I said, perhaps rather casually, 'Oh, they are the stars'. 'I've never seen the stars before,' came Charlie's voice out of his still-covered head. 'Come on,' I said, 'Let's go and look at them.' So we ran onto the field, found the missing jumper, lay down in the mud and looked up and watched ... in silence.

The silence continued for some time, then Charlie let out a series of long, loud, 'wows, weeees, and woowowows.' Eventually he turned his head towards mine, our ears in the mud, and said, 'There ain't no stars in Kilburn!'

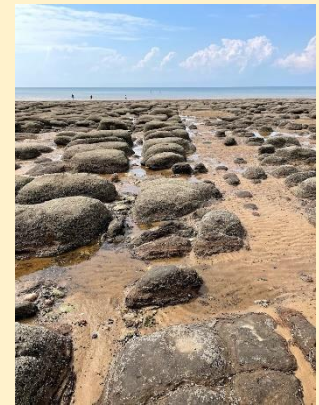


Charlie sees the universe beyond himself for the first time. How he goes on to define his selfhood and his perception of himself by coming into relationship with this 'Other' I do not know, but I believe he has discovered his own agency. Before this experience his 'truth' did not include the infinite lights and darkness of space but, as Brian Swimme (2005) affirms, when a child gazes at the stars: 'Something happens inside, a spaciousness opens up which is in psychic congruence with galactic spaciousness'. Here is

hope for the Charlies of this world who, given the opportunity, will not only experience beyond themselves but also feel and think beyond themselves, finding truth in relationship with Others. We need to de-authorize ourselves, lest instead of accompanying children and young people as they slip through the fissures of the dualistic world into a spiritual space, we cause them the pain and disorientation of what the poet R.S. Thomas terms 'a hernia of the spirit'. Silence plays a fundamental part in all these experiences.

Epiphanies of connectedness

Mary Grey describes what she says Thomas Merton called, 'the secret that is heard only in silence ... a spirituality of epiphanies of connectedness, a way of healing fragmentation and brokenness. It is putting together the fragmented pieces of our broken selves; it is creating a soulscape by giving our emotions time and space; it is 're-memembering' ... even though reaching backwards into the past.' (Grey 1997, p. 20). In my experience, children are more ready than adults to discover the 'secret that is only heard in silence'. Adults, addicted both to reductionist dualism and to a cynical postmodern narrative of uncertainty, devise ways in which to educate children out of creativity and spirituality in order to become masters and owners in our globalized, commercialised disquiet. As I understand it, Godly Play, at its best, offers the gift of holy silence to both children and their accompanying adults. Not only is silence a gift to those who wish not to speak, it is also a gift to those who are tempted to speak too much! Celebrating our privilege to be able to create a soul-scape which includes those who are often denied speech, as well as those who would prefer not to speak, we can be assured that silence is essential if we are to experience any epiphanies.



'You taught us how to be
motivated by how much you would sell.
We loved what you offered:
your digital war, collaborating
with the entrepreneurs of cash,
carrying your marketing of two for one,
your virtual living through sophisticated screens,
your fantasies of small horizons.
You taught us how to live this way,
we learnt there was no other way.

It is the only way the world works, you said.
But you never told us about the quiet,
the epiphanies of connection
about discovering the secret
that is only heard in silence.
Why?

It would have made so much difference.'

(Poem written on behalf of children after saying goodbye to a school at the end of their residential stay.)

References

David M Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being*, Routledge, 1985; David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006; Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story*. Orbis Books, 2005; Mary Grey, *Prophecy and Mysticism: The Heart of the Postmodern Church*. Bloomsbury, 1997.

The SCALE of the journey: giant to miniature and back again

By Wendy Heaton

Wendy is a Godly Play Advocate for the Isle of Man. A former primary school teacher, she is a Church of England Reader and a dedicated and talented crafter. Here she tells us something of her journey with Godly Play on the Isle of Man and in particular, the challenge of making resources.

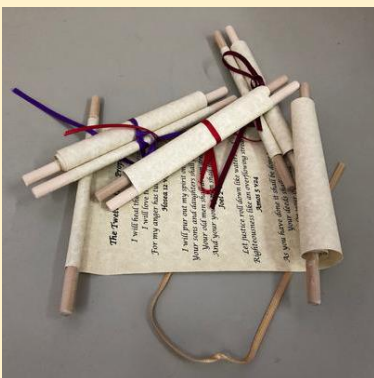


My first experience of Godly Play was at best frustrating and at worst infuriating ... We were living in Durham whilst my husband was training to become an Anglican priest and I had been coerced into joining the spouses' meeting with no idea what to expect. The story was the Great Family and the slow pace of the characters through the sand drove me nuts. My impatience for some excitement, and the passion of being an experienced primary school teacher, led me to the conclusion that if this is a teaching method for Christianity, it's no wonder the Church is dying out! Clearly no-one asked, 'Are you ready?'

It was quite surprising, then, that several years later I found myself on a three-day training course to become a Godly Play storyteller. By this time, we were on the Isle of Man, where I grew up, and my husband was in his first post as a vicar. I was training to become a Reader in the Church of England and my training advisor invited me to join the course. The fact that the training was being paid for by the diocese and that his wife (a friend of mine) was so enthusiastic about Godly Play persuaded me to give it a go.

Seeing the big picture

As an extrovert, I really did struggle with aspects of the Godly Play method, and I am thankful to trainers Mary and Kathryn for their infinite patience. Quiet and reflective would never be a natural place for me, but as a person with dyslexia, my brain's ability to think outside the box and make links that others don't see meant my imagination was set on fire by this way of working. I have always found reading so tiring, yet the Bible now came alive to me in a big-picture sort of way, and like many who have just finished their training, I was full of enthusiasm to get started.



Teaching at the local primary school, I was fortunate to be able to start introducing some Godly Play straight away. I easily made myself a desert bag from the pattern online, collected a portion of sand from our local beach and purchased my beloved original peg people from eBay. The first story I ever told was the story of the prophets which fitted in with the Manx RE curriculum. At the end of the story, a boy for whom everything was normally 'boring' exclaimed, 'This is the best RE lesson we've ever had!' My epic journey had begun ...

The materials challenge

Having now encountered the power of Godly Play, I faced the gargantuan task of making resources. There is no Godly Play room here on the Isle of Man and even though the Diocese had purchased quite a few stories, I knew that if I was to make the most of this

teaching method, I needed to have a full set of materials. From that moment on, my 'quiet' time with God was filled with the noise of an electric scroll saw. I had found an extrovert way of being reflective and productive at the same time!

It took me about three years to make a full set, trawling charity shops and eBay along the way. During that time, I took every opportunity I could to incorporate Godly Play stories into school RE lessons, children's work in church, sermons and Messy Church as well as a community-based group called 'When we wonder'. We even set up the chancel of one of our churches as a temporary Godly Play space for the annual Scripture Union



beach mission that has been happening here in Port St Mary for over 100 years. Hundreds of children each year, over a fortnight, get to hear the good news and now also experience Godly Play. It was so good to get even a small taster of what it would be like to have a dedicated Godly Play space.

By now our boys had grown up and left home. I was therefore able to claim their bedrooms for my ever-growing collection of Godly Play resources. One is a dedicated room to store the resources; the other is a craft room space where I make them. I feel very blessed to have so much space and enjoy sharing my resources with other storytellers here on the Island.

Making and praying

After completing the Godly Play resource collection, I couldn't really stop, so I have also made some of the Faith and Play stories (Quaker Godly Play), as well as all the materials needed for *Living in a Fragile World* (a teaching resource on conservation and citizenship by Peter Privett – now sadly out of print). I get so much enjoyment making these resources and praying for the people who will use them, and those who will receive the message held within them. However, despite all of this, my desire for a full Godly Play space has never diminished. It was with this in mind that I returned to a previous hobby of mine, making miniatures and dolls' houses.



An ingenious space

As many of you may have seen from my posts on Facebook, last December I started making a fully equipped Godly Play room in 1/12th scale. That means every foot in real life becomes one



inch in the model. It has required every craft skill I possess, along with a lot of patience, tweezers and good eyesight! Through the making of this room, I have gained a real insight into what makes a good Godly Play space and how cleverly the space has been organised to enable the best learning experience possible. Never having seen a 'real' Godly Play space, I had never really been able to fully appreciate how interconnected everything is and how the layout of the room is such an all-encompassing, embracing and nurturing experience: a safe space to discover God.

As part of my work as a Reader, I have been trying to develop that same nurturing and learning experience for the children and families in our local church. Wanting to reinvent the idea of a traditional Sunday school, I started providing children and families with Godly Play stories and response materials to work with at the back of church during our services. Originally, we called ourselves 'porch church' as we literally went into the porch to share a story during the sermon. Now our numbers have grown, we no longer fit into the porch, so we venture into the church hall for what we now call 'the wonder zone'. One parent from each family joins us for the stories each week and they are often amazed at what they learn themselves, as well as the insightful comments made by their children. Families say that they continue their learning at home by wondering together over Sunday lunch about that day's story. It's great to know that those 'God conversations' are permeating their family life.

Working in schools

In my role as a Godly Play Advocate, I have been working as part of a small team of fellow Advocates and members of Scripture Union Ministries Trust to develop Godly Play in our local schools. Through my experience of the Manx RE curriculum, the team set about planning how we could incorporate Godly Play stories right across the primary age range. We have also written and made stories of some local saints (Maughold and Bridget) to use in school for the unit of work called 'our local saints'. We contacted all schools to share our plans and offer to come and tell stories. The uptake, despite Covid interruptions, has been very encouraging with many schools receiving stories and one



trialling *Living in a fragile world* as a complete Year 6 unit of work. It was a very powerful set of lessons, stimulating deep conversations, and the Year 6 teacher immediately re-booked us for next year!

A classroom in a box

Knowing how impractical it is to take all resources into schools, I hit on the brainwave of creating a Godly Play classroom 'in a box'. This meant going back once again to my craft room to produce yet another set of stories but this time in at least half size. We now can take into school a box containing the majority of core stories and provide these for children to work with. We take another large plastic box containing response materials. One of the biggest hits with both children and staff are the large Chinese calligraphy mats. These act like a giant Buddha board, using only water to write or draw with and enabling a few children to work on them together at any time. They are very easy to set up in a classroom. Altogether this means that with two large plastic boxes, we can transport a Godly Play classroom to anywhere that might want one.



The scale of the journey

I could never have envisaged when I started this journey just how many different scales I would work. I have worked from the large scale down to the miniature, from a giant 'fuzzy-felt' version of the Good Shepherd down to a doll's house scale classroom. I continue to create resources on many different scales and will continue to do so, but my desire to open the Isle of Man's first ever Godly Play room still burns brightly in my heart. We are getting closer to finding that dream become a reality, so watch this space.

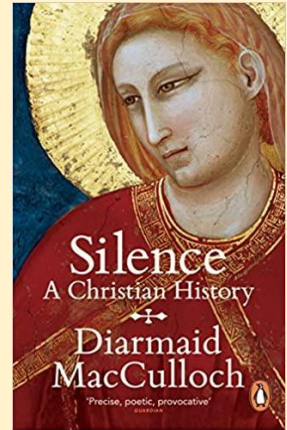
Taking your wondering further...

Book reviews

Silence: A Christian History
Diarmaid MacCulloch, (2014) Penguin

A review by Peter Privett

When planning this edition of the magazine, with its focus on silence, I wondered why we think silence is important. Where did the tradition of contemplative silence come from? Jerome Berryman, in his writing on Godly Play, says that it is the fourth genre. But is silence always to be seen in a positive way? Left with these questions, I soon stumbled across Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Silence: a Christian History*. Originally delivered as the Gifford Lectures in 2012 in Edinburgh, MacCulloch delivers a very readable account, providing a varied and layered understanding of the theme.



The book is divided into four sections. The first two are an exploration of both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and the ambiguity towards silence that is present in both. Both traditions give voice to the tension between keeping silent and an emphasis on speaking and noise. MacCulloch suggests that the strangeness of Hannah's silent prayer (1 Samuel 1.12-13) is recorded because it was unfamiliar and was an early example of understanding silence positively, when previously it had negative associations with defeat, death, and despair. The Christian Scriptures have a similar tension, again with an emphasis on proclaiming good news. The alternative is offered in the accounts of Christ's silence in the narratives of his Passion.

The third section explores the growth and importance of silence in early and later Church history, and the influences of Greek philosophy and different monastic traditions. These promoted the idea that when confronted with the notion and experience of God, any language immediately becomes insufficient and redundant. This resulted in what is called 'negative theology', one which explores what God is not. Silence is important because God transcends all language. The themes of presence and absence, familiar to the theology undergirding Godly Play, are continually present in the conflicts which arose during the Reformation and into the present time. When is it time to speak? When is it time to be silent?

The fourth section explores the damaging ways in which silence has been used collusively by Christianity in its response to slavery, sexual abuse, racism, sexuality, and the need to expose the wounds caused by such silence. Set alongside this is 'Nicodemism,' a term used negatively by Calvin to describe those who lacked conviction like Nicodemus, who visited Jesus by night. But MacCulloch asks: In the face of persecution and oppression, might silence be the required option – 'Silence for Survival'?

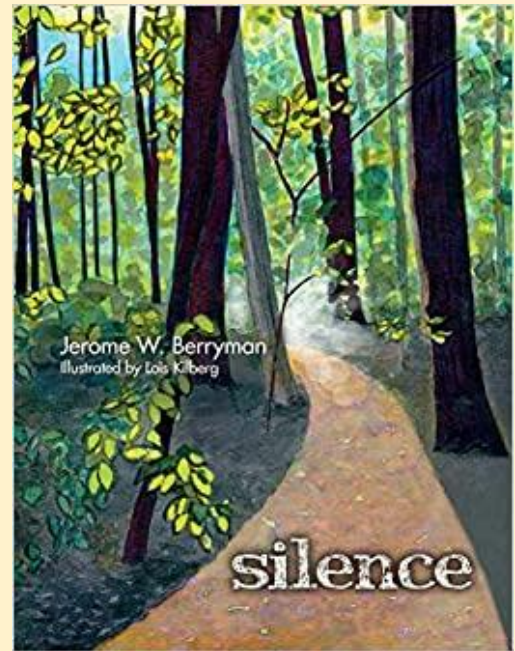
Godly Play practice allows time for speaking, times for wondering and questioning, and times for silence. Diarmaid MacCulloch challenges us, as Godly Play practitioners, to wonder further about the subject in its very varied and ambiguous aspects. It would make a good book group read.

Silence

Jerome W. Berryman, illustrated by Louis Kilberg, (2020) Church Publishing

A review by Sian Hancock

I wonder how you would describe silence. The exercise itself is a juxtaposition ... trying to put into words that which is wordless. This beautiful picture book takes the reader on a journey to experience silence, moving from the noise and activity of the high street into the stillness and quiet of the forest, where silence is encountered. The illustrations reflect the shift from the solid to stripping back what is not needed or may distract: as that all fades, the focus brings a new light. It goes beyond words and yet it is tangible, as the reader is led back out of the forest changed by what has occurred, returning to the familiar but seeing it differently, now knowing and reassured by the depth of connection that has revived them. The concluding wondering questions continue this exploration of silence in true Godly Play style.



This book may resonate with your daily walks amongst growing things in lockdown. You may have experienced restorative healing from the natural world whilst sitting in the garden, walking amongst trees or taking time to watch as the sun sets. You may have encountered the transformative light of silence as you marvelled at the beauty of God's creation.

As trainers, we used this book for our closing reflections at the end of a Zoom meeting. Taking the form of a guided imaginary walk, it provided helpful still space after our discussions before processing and digesting the conversations. Often picture books are assumed to be for children, but sometimes what is communicated alongside the illustration is a rich reminder of what is easily lost in our noisy world.

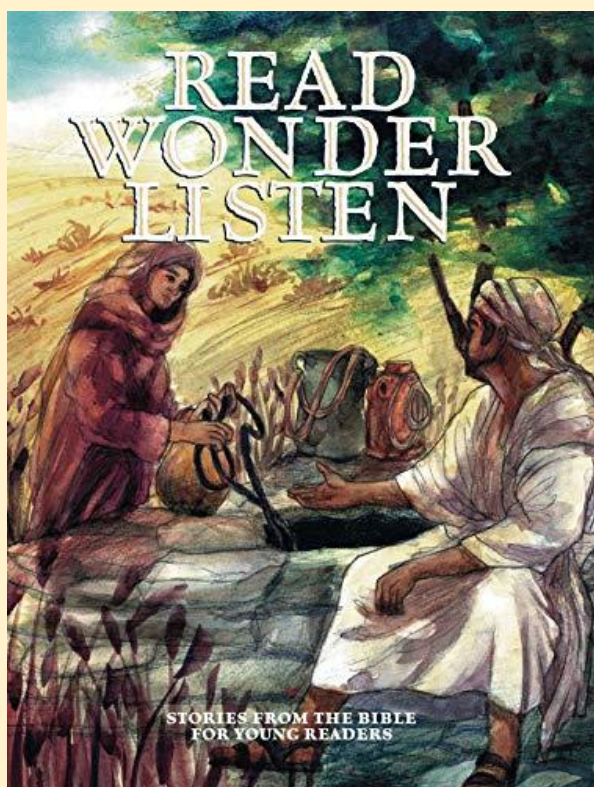
I wonder where you are in silence.

Read, Wonder, Listen: Stories from the Bible for Young Readers

Words by Laura Alary, Illustrated by Ann Sheng, (2018) Wood Lake Publishing

A Review by Eona Bell

This collection of over 100 stories from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is described by the publishers as being 'for young readers.' The text is steeped in the language of Godly Play, and Laura Alary's words invite readers and listeners to enter deeply into the familiar stories, often invoking sensory imagery to enrich our imaginations with sights, sounds, textures and smells. Because Alary takes childhood spirituality seriously, she offers questions, rather than easy, pre-packed interpretations of the stories. Her poetic language is clear and accessible to children but equally beautiful for adult readers who may wish to use the book for personal, prayerful reflection on scripture. I could have



been standing alongside Ezekiel as I read about his vision of the dry bones: 'Ezekiel felt a breeze. It tickled the back of his neck. Stirred the sand at his feet. Danced among the lifeless figures. A deep sigh rose up as the breath of the wind entered them. God's own breath. The breath of life.'

Ann Sheng's paintings, which illustrate each story, are grounded in historical research and depict people of the Ancient Middle East. This is one aspect of the inclusivity which marks this book out from others. Another is the strong representation of women and girls. The story often known as 'Moses in the bulrushes' is told here as the tale of 'Some brave women and a baby'!

This is outstanding as a 'children's Bible', and ideal for the bookshelves of a Godly Play room – but you will probably want a copy of your own.



Thanks to all our photographers. Some images were supplied by the authors. Thanks also to Sheila Rogers, Peter Privett, Alison Summerskill and St Michael's Workshop, Bowthorpe.

The Feast

A chance to meet ... An interview with Adrian Chatfield

Adrian is one of the Trustees of the Godly Play UK charity. An Anglican priest and theological educator, Adrian was brought up in Trinidad, and it was there that his ordained ministry began. As well as fifteen years of parish ministry, he spent over twenty years in theological education, in the UK and in South Africa, before establishing the Simeon Centre for Prayer and Spiritual Life at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. Now retired and living in Derbyshire, he runs and rides his bicycle up and down hills, as well as taking lovely photographs.

Godly Play starts with children – so tell us about when you were a child.



I remember that as far back as being five years old, I knew I had faith. I lived in my head, and faith was a story that I wanted to belong to. My father was a priest of an Anglo-Catholic congregation, and church was a playful sort of place. There was room for everyone; I was a server from being very small and I knew I had something to contribute. I realised that my faith was as important there as that of any of the grown-ups.

How did you first come across Godly Play?

I first saw it in action in relation to dementia. It was at a Simeon Centre day conference, and Joanna Collicut was one of the speakers. She showed us how Godly Play could be supportive for the spirituality of people living with dementia.

When I discovered it, I thought, 'This makes entire sense. Why have I not heard of it before?'

Why do you think it makes sense?

Godly Play is about involvement and immersion, and it is fun. And if the gospel is not fun, then what is it? The God who made us and loves us wants us to be involved in a fun story. I am attached to a sensory way of engaging with the gospel – an embodied theology. Actually, it is the Eastern Church that is better at this. It has never been a strength of the Western Church. A long time ago there was a Fisher Folk song called, 'I want to see the world through five-year-old eyes.' I still have a copy of it – and it's worth looking out for.

One of things I am working on at the moment is a plan for a pilgrimage of the senses: finding a way to spend some time with God through each of the senses.

What do you think might be Godly Play's potential?

Godly Play makes such sense, but I would never use it to park the children so that as grownups we can do 'proper church'. Congregations need the presence and participation of children. When I was a parish priest in Barnstaple, I once asked my son and his friend to talk to the congregation about their journeys of faith. The attention of the congregation was remarkable.

It's a pity that lots of people in the church know the term 'Godly Play' but very few bother to find out what it is. They need to know that it is not another version of Messy Church, but something very different.

We need to continue working at ways to make it known to the church, so that they appreciate the significant oddness that it is not just Christian entertainment but rather full participatory engagement with the story of God that transcends mere cognition and connects with the other significant ways of grasping hold of the truth and wonder of God.

Bite-sized news

Thank you, Kathryn

Kathryn Lord has frequently contributed to these pages and inspired many people to do Godly Play in her role as a Trainer in Sheffield. She also set up 'Stories for the Soul' to help people wanting to do Godly Play in care homes. Kathryn is giving up her trainer role to pursue other projects. She has boundless energy and enthusiasm, and we will miss all that she has brought to the College of Trainers, but wish her all that is good and life-giving in her many new ventures.



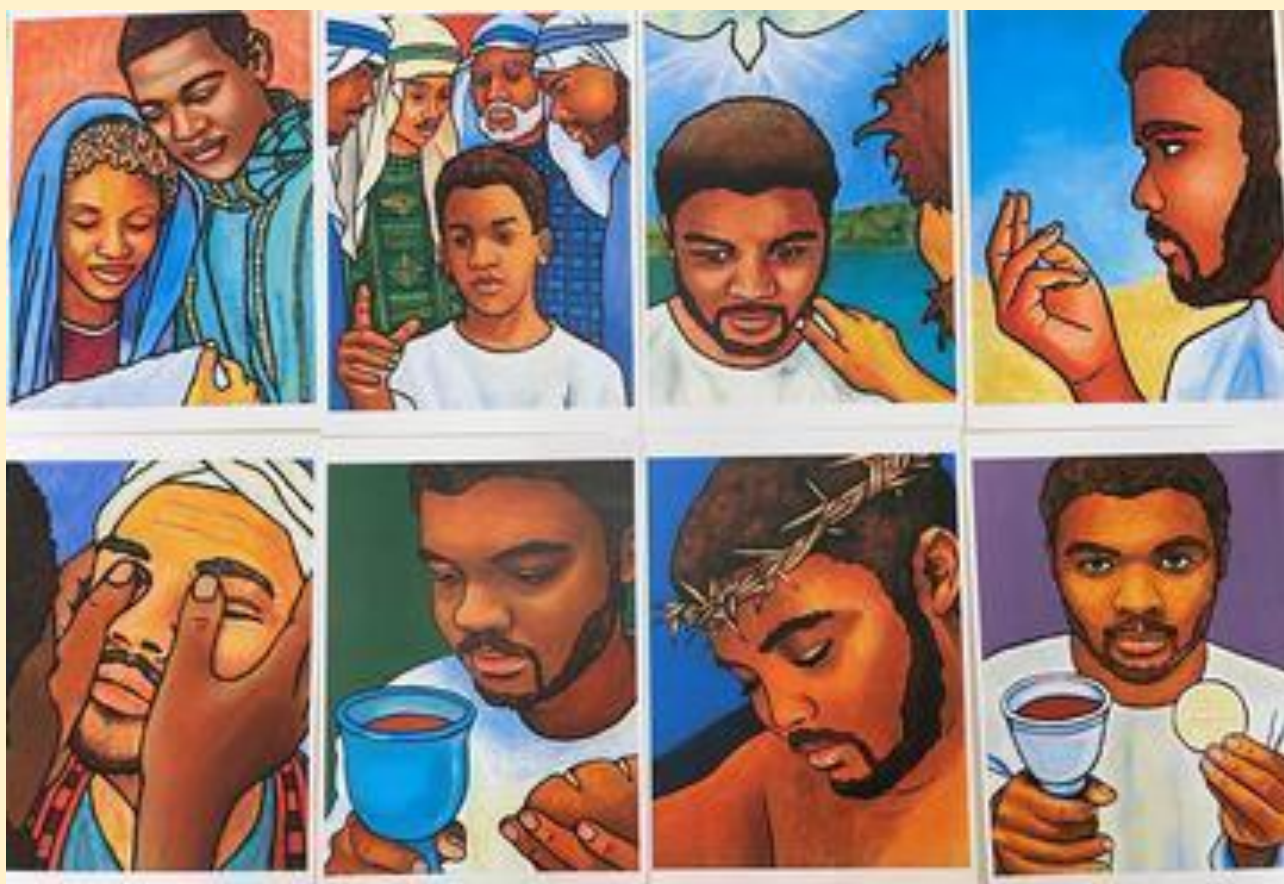
Advocates flock to online gathering

A number of Advocates met together online to share in the Story of Pentecost. But it didn't end there. Not only was there lots of wondering, but as we went into deeper conversation, we began to open up and share life together. In 'ordinary shepherd style', I introduced Elwin, a ten-week-old lamb whom we have rescued from a very dark place. Perhaps the ending to our time together was a little chaotic, but it was delightful. And it reminded us that the Good Shepherd is with us everywhere, even in the virtual Zoom space. Advocates – I would wholeheartedly recommend joining others

online. You may be pleasantly surprised, as I was, to be so deeply blessed in the virtual company of the People of God. Thank you to Katherine and Mary for a wonderful evening – and even though we were limited to an online meeting, this was truly a sacred space.

Richard Prescott is a Godly Play Advocate.

New Faces of Easter available from Bowthorpe



In 2020 the Godly Play Foundation in the USA commissioned artist Ann Fowler to create new images for the Godly Play series of lessons for Lent. Fowler's Faces of Easter feature people of colour, children and youth, known to her from her work at the Emmaus House, an educational programme for children living in low-income neighbourhoods in Atlanta.

We are delighted that the new Faces of Easter are now available to order from our UK supplier of Godly Play materials, St Michael's Workshop, Bowthorpe
<https://shop.stmichaelsworkshop.com/>

Bob Burrell, General Manager at the workshop, tells us that staff, volunteers and trainees are continuing to work hard and remain upbeat despite the challenges of redundancies, higher costs for exports and a worldwide shortage of timber which may oblige them to increase the prices of larger items in coming months. As ever, we are thankful for the careful labour which goes into making resources for Godly Play in the UK, within the supportive environment at Bowthorpe. This personal approach means that orders sometimes take time, so do try to plan ahead when ordering new materials!

Lunchtime journeys

Mine Yildirim has been sharing the story of the People of God in a school lunch club.

It has been an incredible privilege to journey with the children in the story of the People of God in the lunch club that I offered at a school nearby for Y3 and Y4 students. We started with the Great Family and will end with Exile and Return. Being able to share

these stories weekly helped us all to follow the story as one big story. When, in the Exodus story, I said ‘Some even wanted to go back to Egypt’, some children exclaimed, ‘What? No!’ because the slavery in Egypt was still very fresh in their minds. Some children who already had a familiarity with some of the stories seemed to pick up the Godly Play language and liked to repeat it, ‘God came so close to Moses and Moses can so close to God...’. I am deeply moved by how, as weeks pass, the children start sharing about the suffering of loved ones during our work and prayer time. Ending our time with the song, ‘Go now in peace...’ seemed a bit weird to them initially. But as it has become our parting ritual, they started to join in, or some have said that ‘I love this song’ and ‘Aren’t we going to sing the song?’ A few of the children have quit for different reasons and others have taken their places – there is a long list of those who want to join. We have parted with love and welcomed new players with much joy. However, with the core group of children who have stayed with the group we enjoy the ‘knowing’ that comes with journeying together over a long period of time.

Trustees of Godly Play UK

Godly Play in the UK is part of a global network, overseen by the Godly Play Foundation based in the USA. We have a covenant of agreement with the Foundation that sets standards and expectations of our UK charity and its work.



Godly Play UK is a charity, and its wellbeing is overseen by a small group of trustees. You can find out about us here www.godlyplay.uk/about-us/who-we-are/

The trustees’ responsibilities are to ensure that Godly Play UK works for the public benefit and towards the aims it was founded to achieve. Trustees are responsible for planning what the charity will do and ensuring that its funds are directed towards that. They must also ensure that the charity works within the law, that its funds are responsibly managed, and are not open to fraudulent use or theft.

Above all, the Trustees are people who really value Godly Play and seek to support the work of its trainers so that people can learn about it through high quality training and advice.

The Trustees are a group with different gifts and backgrounds, from across England and Wales, and everyone contributes from their own experience, which is really helpful. They meet two or three times a year. Recently these meetings have been on Zoom, which has saved on time and money, and makes becoming a trustee more accessible. As things open up again, face-to-face meetings will become possible once more, but may be an annual event.

Would you be interested in this?

If you would like to learn more about being a trustee, please contact admin@godlyplay.uk so that you can be put in touch with someone who can discuss this with you. In line with charity law and government advice, a recruitment process must be followed (but it is not scary!!!)

We would particularly love to hear from people who would increase our diversity in any way.

Sending out

Courses

Please make our courses known wherever you can.

The new website www.godlyplay.uk/training/ carries details of all available courses and they can now be booked and paid for online.

We are resuming face-to-face three-day core training courses from October.

An Experience of Godly Play

This is simply a 90-minute taster of a Godly Play session for people who simply want to find out what Godly Play is. Experiences are advertised on the website and can be booked at www.godlyplay.uk/events/



Online Introductions

Our Online Introduction to Godly Play is run over four ninety-minute sessions, each a week apart. Over the four sessions participants encounter the basics of Godly Play and experience the three different types of Godly Play story. The cost is £45, and courses can be booked online at www.godlyplay.uk/events/

Forthcoming Online Introductions begin on 28 September and 16 October 2021

Three-day Core Trainings

Three-day accredited courses are led by members of the College of Trainers of Godly Play UK. The training enables participants to use the Godly Play method and understand its principles. The training follows an action/reflection model of learning, through hands-on experience and reflection, rather than lectures. There are both residential and non-residential courses available.

More details about each course are on the website at www.godlyplay.uk/events/ where a booking can be made.

Potential participants may like to check out further details before booking or prefer to pay in a different way. As always, our Administrator, Sheila Rogers, will be really helpful, and she can be contacted at admin@godlyplay.uk.

23 – 25 October 2021 Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire – residential or non-residential

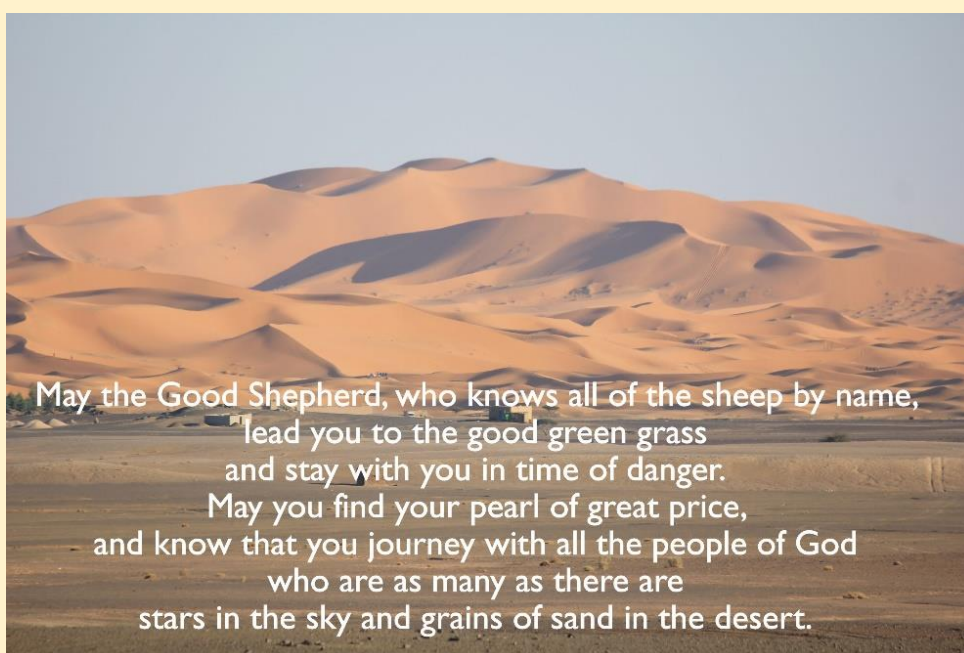
2 – 4 November 2021, Cliff College, Derbyshire – residential

29 November – 1 December 2021, Chelmsford, Essex – residential

14 – 16 March 2022, Gloucester – non-residential

5 – 7 April 2022, Cliff College, Derbyshire – residential

Further details of the two courses and booking forms for Cliff College courses can be found at <https://cliffcollege.ac.uk/courses/short-course-mid-week/godly-play-training>



www.godlyplay.uk

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